"I WALKED IN A DESERT":
THE HEROIC QUEST IN STEPHEN CRANE'S POETRY

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by

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the last two or three decades Stephen Crane has been given a rather prominent place in modern American fiction: some critics have gone so far as to cite his fiction as a turning point in American literature, situated as Crane was among the first great "realists" and "naturalists" in our literary heritage. The Red Badge of Courage can now be called a "classic" with a degree of confidence and a minimum of qualification; his numerous short stories, notably "The Open Boat," "The Blue Hotel," and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," are praised and anthologized; the influences of his works upon contemporary writers are tracked down and pointed out by interested critics. In short, Crane seems to have finally been granted the merit he deserves in American fiction.

His secure place in American literature largely derives, however, from his fiction. His poetry still remains somewhat under a critical cloud. Until 1956 the poetry was virtually neglected. The "revivals" of his work every twenty years or so (occasioned by Thomas Beer's biography in 1923 and John Berryman's in 1950) mainly concerned his fiction: critics treated his poetry, if at all, as adolescent, contradictory, incoherent, or decadent. When

Daniel Hoffman published The Poetry of Stephen Crane in 1956, he had the field to himself--his was the first full-length study which accepted the poetry as worthy of such consideration.

It is only recently, in fact, that the complete body of Crane's poetry has become available to the public. Daniel Hoffman was one of the first to have access to manuscripts at Columbia University which had long been unavailable; his book published many poems or poem fragments previously unknown. In 1966 all the poems were finally assembled in a definitive edition under the direction of Joseph Katz. This collection includes the poems in The Black Riders and Other Lines, War Is Kind, and other heretofore separately published poems which Katz numbered consecutively, 135 in all.

Admittedly, the body of Crane's poetry is small; undoubtedly it could not support an unlimited number of studies such as Hoffman's. Even since 1956, however, there has been no overwhelming critical interest in the poetry, possibly because, as some critics feel, Hoffman nearly exhausted the subject. But when we consider that Crane himself liked his poetry better than The Red Badge of Courage, crediting the "lines" with giving "my ideas of life as

a whole,"[1] perhaps we can agree that further study and explication are warranted.

Further study is especially valid when we proceed with the goal of relating the bulk of Crane's poetry to one central, informing motif--the pattern of the hero on a quest, expressed as a parody. An examination of what Crane's major critics have named as his most important themes begins to point toward this motif. Eric Solomon views Crane's work, primarily his fiction, as a progression from parody to realism, adding, "Indeed, it could be argued that his trenchant, black poems were also parodies."[2] In linking the parody to the hero motif, Solomon comments, "Crane frequently managed to extract from the . . . forms he parodied the archetypal or mythical story that underlay the stereotype. He reached below surface realism toward a view of man's comic and terrible freedom of choice."[3] William Bysshe Stein sees Crane's work as a commitment "to record the anxiety, the frustration, the despair, the irrationality, and the absurdity of existence."[4] In a similar view, Maurice Bassan

[1]Quoted in The Poems of Stephen Crane, ed. Joseph Katz (New York: Cooper Square, 1966), p. xvii.

[2]Eric Solomon, Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), p. 15.

[3]Ibid., p. 17.

[4]William Bysshe Stein, "Stephen Crane's Homo Absurdus," Bucknell Review, VIII (May, 1959), 168.

asserts that "Crane's major target was the nature of man himself, his hypocrisy, his weakness, his pitiful capitulation before the gods of respectability."[1] In John Berryman's opinion, "Man's vanity and cruelty, hypocrisy and cowardice, stupidity and pretension, hopelessness and fear, glitter through the early poems."[2] These views reinforce our belief that Crane's poems are parodies, bitter little ironies describing man and his weaknesses--but what is the basis for applying the hero and quest motif?

In reading Crane's poetry, one finds that a striking image begins to impinge itself upon one's consciousness: the image of a young man wandering alone through strange landscapes, meeting various representative beings, becoming involved in all manner of conflicts. If this were a true mythological and romantic journey, this young man would be faced with a nearly impossible conflict (killing a dragon, for instance), the surmounting of which will entitle him to the hand of the princess in marriage or some such valuable reward. Such is hardly the case in Stephen Crane's poetry, however. To our young wanderer, the conflict is too impossible to be resolved, and the ending is anything but happy.

[1]Maurice Bassan, "Introduction," Stephen Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 3.

[2]John Berryman, Stephen Crane (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), p. 35.

This same young wanderer appears in Stephen Crane's fiction; critics have given this fictional hero much attention. Henry Fleming, the young soldier of The Red Badge of Courage; the Swede in "The Blue Hotel"; the oiler in "The Open Boat"; George Kelcey; Private Nolan--all have been traced and followed through their respective stories with an eye to their heroic (or antiheroic) qualities, and what they consequently reveal about Crane's philosophy. Eric Solomon gives these heroes enough importance to state:

> If we should seek an archetypal plot for Stephen Crane's fiction, the plot would be something like this: a youth, innocent and contemplative (in the later work, a man, nervous and apprehensive), ventures into a world of violence and rage (unleashed by war, by external nature, and by society itself); he is buffeted, and his existence is jeopardized; he runs, and perhaps he escapes, probably losing something of value. He doesn't really grow, but ends with a whimper. Yet he has looked upon evil, and survived.[1]

This statement, though made about Crane's fiction, can apply with striking relevance to his poetry.

Daniel Hoffman contributes to our search for this central motif. For the hero, two stable qualities of daily life will be isolation and conflict. These two qualities are abundantly present in Crane's poetry, according to Hoffman: "For Crane the natural state of man is conflict, against a cruel God, an indifferent nature, an ironic fate. . . . Confronting huge amoral forces, the

[1]Solomon, p. 12.

individual hews the solitary path of his own unimportant life."[1] Hoffman calls Crane an "isolato" in his art and in his life: "In Crane we see the isolato in a deterministic world; man is made infinitesimal by the hugeness of natural forces against which he struggles, not to impose his will, but to live in accordance with a code that allows him dignity despite his insignificance."[2] Hoffman continues, "The governing metaphor of almost all of his verse is his absolute aloneness, . . . the relentless exploration of the isolated soul. . . ."[3] What could be more isolated than a young hero, faced with a difficult task, helped by no one? When numerous examples of this isolation become obvious throughout the poetry, one naturally relates them to this wandering young man, always alone except when faced by an obstacle or an enemy.

Other elements relate Crane's poetry to the quest motif. The very sound of the poetry stirs up visions of an ancient and ageless journey. John Berryman says, "Crane's poetry is like a series of primitive anti-spells. . . . What he says is savage: unprotected, forestlike. . . ."[4] The poetry "has the character of a 'dream,' something seen

[1]Daniel Hoffman, The Poetry of Stephen Crane (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1956), p. 146.

[2]Ibid., p. 216. [3]Ibid., p. 271.

[4]Berryman, p. 35.

naively, in a new relation. It is barbaric. . . ."[1] The sound and imagery of the poetry will be examined later in great detail, of course, but this poem is a good example:

> I walked in a desert.
> And I cried:
> "Ah, God, take me from this place!"
> A voice said: "It is no desert."
> I cried: "Well, but--
> The sand, the heat, the vacant horizon."
> A voice said: "It is no desert."[2]

One feels something very sinister and frightening in the picture presented here. Besides the sinister effect, this poem serves to reinforce several points previously made.

First, we find a journey, a quest: "I walked in a desert." The speaker is obviously alone, so isolated that when he calls upon God he is answered only by an anonymous "voice." Again, this quest is somewhat unusual: the wanderer is surrounded by sand, heat, horizon; far from meeting a noble challenge culminating in a glorious victory, he cannot even find his way out of this empty place that is not even a desert. These motifs--the journey, the isolation, the confusion--are repeated over and over in Crane's poetry.

Was Crane conscious of his use of this myth? The answer is somewhat beyond the scope of this paper; Hoffman, however, mentions, in elucidating Crane's sources, the

[1] Ibid.

[2] Poems of Stephen Crane, ed. Katz, p. 45, poem No. 42. All poems quoted hereafter in the text will be identified parenthetically by number according to this edition.

"unavailability to him of the great word-hoards of history, the sources of metaphor and myth central to the world traditions of culture."[1] Whether he patterned his poetry intentionally or not is thus rather a moot point; the fact remains, such a pattern can be found. As Edwin Cady said, Stephen Crane was fated to be "a seeker after the secret of his own vision."[2] That this search coincides with what Joseph Katz calls the "journey motif within The Black Riders"[3] will soon be evident.

[1]Hoffman, p. 217.

[2]Edwin H. Cady, Stephen Crane (New York: Twayne, 1962), p. 73.

[3]Katz, p. xlvi.

CHAPTER II

THE MONOMYTH

Before we examine the hero and quest motifs flowing from the ironic pen of Stephen Crane, perhaps it would first be well to investigate the genesis of this motif; that is, what the hero myth has been and what it should be. With this background, we can better see the parodic changes rung upon the tale in the poems of Stephen Crane.

The idea of the hero and the quest has its beginning, of course, in mythology. Virtually every civilization, every race, every ethnic group possesses ancient tales of a supernatural hero. Such universal occurrence of basically the same story is an interesting phenomenon in human development, giving rise to the use of such terms as _mythology_, _archetype_, and _primordial image_. While we will not attempt here to study the full meaning and ramifications of such terms, a basic definition would be of use, so that these terms may be used with some degree of exactness in the rest of the paper.

The word _mythology_ itself may be subject to varied interpretations and misunderstandings. Joseph Campbell, in his excellent book _The Hero with a Thousand Faces_, examines the multiple uses and interpretations to which mythology has been put:

> Mythology has been interpreted by the modern intellect as a primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature (Frazer); as a production of poetical fantasy from prehistoric times, misunderstood by succeeding ages (Muller); as a repository of allegorical instruction, to shape the individual to his group (Durkheim); as a group dream, symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche (Jung); as the traditional vehicle of man's profoundest metaphysical insights (Coomaraswamy); and as God's revelation to his children (the Church). Mythology is all of these. The various judgments are determined by the viewpoints of the judges.[1]

Although, of all the above, Jung's concept is currently most popular in literature and literary criticism, we nevertheless find it necessary to broaden his definition of mythology somewhat to include more aspects of its meaning. This definition, which Philip Wheelwright quotes from the Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, is acceptable: ". . . a story or a complex of story elements taken as expressing and therefore as implicitly symbolizing, certain deep-lying aspects of human and transhuman experience."[2] This definition allows us to include nearly all facets of the hero "story" in the usage of the word mythology.

The definition of archetype is even more difficult. On a basic level, Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman's A Handbook to Literature defines the word in this way:

[1]Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 2nd ed. (1949; rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 382.

[2]Philip Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain: A Study in The Language of Symbolism (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), p. 148.

> A term brought into literary criticism from the depth psychology of Carl Jung, who holds that behind each individual's "unconscious"--the blocked-off residue of his past--lies the "collective unconscious" of the human race--the blocked-off memory of our racial past, even of our prehuman experiences. This unconscious racial memory makes powerfully effective for us a group of "primordial images" shaped by the repeated experience of our ancestors and expressed in myths, religions, dreams, and fantasies, and powerfully in literature. T. S. Eliot says, "The pre-logical mentality persists in civilized man, but becomes available only to or through the poet." The "primordial image" which taps this "pre-logical mentality" is called the archetype. . . .[1]

Carl G. Jung, who was the first to popularize the term, though not the first to use it, contended that a definition of the term is difficult, if not impossible. Some of his partial definitions include: ". . . a tendency to form representations of a motif, . . . an instinctive trend, . . . pieces of life itself--images that are integrally connected to the living individual by the bridge of the emotions."[2] Archetypes, he said, are "a pre-existent form,"[3] which are contained in the collective unconscious and cannot be analyzed or explained.

Jung's colleague Jolande Jacobi perhaps does a better job of describing what Jung meant by archetype. Archetypes,

[1]Addison Hibbard, C. Hugh Holman, and William Flint Thrall, A Handbook to Literature (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), pp. 31-32.

[2]Carl G. Jung, ed., Man and His Symbols (New York: Dell, 1968), pp. 58, 87.

[3]Carl G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (New York: Pantheon, 1959), p. 43.

he says, are the "contents of the collective unconscious, . . . factors and motifs that arrange the psychic elements into certain images, characterized as archetypes, but in such a way that they can be recognized only from the effects they produce."[1] He continues to analyze Jung's meaning:

> At first the notion of the archetype was applied by Jung primarily to psychic "motifs" that could be expressed in images. But in time it was extended to all sorts of patterns, configurations, happenings, etc., hence to dynamic processes as well as static representations. Ultimately it came to cover all psychic manifestations of a biological, psychological, or ideational character, provided they were more or less universal and typical.[2]

Jung's definition thus grew from the more specific to the more general; the definition has become so all-inclusive as to be unwieldy for ordinary use. It must be narrowed again for the purposes of our analysis of Stephen Crane's poetry. However, the broad and all-pervasive meaning of archetype intended by Jung must be kept in mind.

In order for the term to be usable, however, a more exact interpretation will be proposed. Jacobi continues, "One must constantly bear in mind that what we mean by 'archetype' is in itself irrepresentable, but that it has effects which enable us to visualize it, namely the 'archetypal images.'"[3] In concrete form, then, the archetype

[1]Jolande Jacobi, Complex/Archetype/Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung (New York: Pantheon, 1957), p. 77.

[2]Ibid., p. 34. [3]Ibid., p. 35.

becomes an archetypal image. We cannot visualize or communicate the deeply-felt stirring of emotion inherent in Jung's archetype; but we can visualize a young hero setting out on a quest, and the pattern of events and adventures that befall him, the archetypal image. It is to the archetypal image, and to the pattern it connotes, that we will refer when we use the term archetype.

Maud Bodkin's book Archetypal Patterns in Poetry deals with the entire subject of archetypes and their relation to poetry; she says:

> I shall use the term "archetypal pattern" to refer to that within us which, in Gilbert Murray's phrase, leaps in response to the effective presentation in poetry of an ancient theme. The hypothesis to be examined is that in poetry . . . we may identify themes having a particular form or pattern which persists amid variation from age to age, and which corresponds to a pattern or configuration of emotional tendencies in the minds of those who are stirred by the theme.[1]

Later in the book she rephrases her definition slightly: "The patterns we are studying can be regarded in two ways--as recurring themes or image-sequences in poetry, and as configurations of forces or tendencies within the responding mind."[2] Not desiring to delve too deeply into "configurations . . . within the . . . mind," we will concentrate in this paper on the first aspect of Miss Bodkin's definition,

[1]Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (1934: rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 4.

[2]Ibid., p. 70.

"recurring themes or image-sequences in poetry." Finally, Northrop Frye defines archetype in a fashion acceptable for our use. He says an archetype is "a typical or recurring image, . . . a symbol which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole."[1]

Philip Wheelwright supplies examples of archetypal patterns as used in this paper:

> A genuine archetype shows itself to have a life of its own, far older and more comprehensive than ideas belonging to the individual consciousness or to the shared consciousness of particular communities. The Divine Father, the Earth Mother, the World Tree, the satyr or centaur or other man-animal amalgams, the descent into Hell, . . . the culture-hero such as Prometheus bringing fire or other basic gifts to mankind, the treacherous betrayal of the hero, . . .--these and many other mythologems are persistent patterns of human thought and expression, and have become story-elements repeatedly in the literature of many different and often unrelated races.[2]

The "universal symbol,"[3] the image and pattern that recur in many races and places--this is what we mean by archetype.

One of the most-recurring of these patterns, of course, is the hero archetype. Frye calls it the "central myth in literature, in its narrative aspect,"[4] and Joseph Campbell points out that the mythological adventure of the

[1]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (1957; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 99.

[2]Wheelwright, p. 54. [3]Frye, Anatomy, p. 118.

[4]Northrop Frye, Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York: Harcourt, 1963), p. 18.

hero is called the monomyth--the one myth--by James Joyce in Finnegans Wake.[1] The myth of the hero is the most common and best known myth in the world. "We find it in the classical mythology of Greece and Rome, in the Middle Ages, in the Far East, and among contemporary primitive tribes. It also appears in our dreams. It has an obvious dramatic appeal, and a less obvious, but nonetheless profound, psychological importance."[2] Whether or not Stephen Crane realized the universality of the myth, and he probably did not, the pervasive theme of the hero found its way more or less by nature into his poetry.

Excellent descriptions of the hero archetype abound. Joseph Campbell's study of the hero provides the basis for any application of the hero myth to literature. In one passage, Campbell describes the hero cycle as follows:

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.[3]

This cycle usually includes three steps: separation, initiation or transformation, and return. The details of the journey vary enormously in detail from civilization to

[1] Campbell, p. 30n.

[2] Joseph L. Henderson, "Ancient Myths and Modern Man," Man and His Symbols, ed. Carl Jung (New York: Dell, 1968), p. 101.

[3] Campbell, p. 30.

civilization, of course. Campbell explains:

> The changes rung on the simple scale of the monomyth defy description. Many tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements of the full cycle (test motif, flight motif), others string a number of independent cycles into a single series. Differing characters or episodes can become fused, or a single element can reduplicate itself and reappear under many changes.[1]

But structurally the various tales are very similar. They have a universal pattern, even though they were developed by groups or individuals without any direct cultural contact with each other. Such an occurrence is indeed an anthropological phenomenon. "Over and over again one hears a tale describing a hero's miraculous but humble birth, his early proof of superhuman strength, his rapid rise to prominence or power, his triumphant struggle with the forces of evil, his fallibility to the sin of pride (hybris), and his fall through betrayal or a 'heroic' sacrifice that ends in his death."[2]

With all its variations and changes, then, the complete and basic hero myth will follow this structural pattern elucidated by Joseph Campbell:

> The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence

[1]Ibid., p. 246.

[2]Henderson, p. 101.

> that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical help (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again--if the powers have remained unfriendly to him--his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon he brings restores the world (elixir).[1]

The point of the entire quest, of course, is the gaining of the reward, whatever form it may take. It is this reward upon which the success of the quest hinges. "Traditionally," W. H. Auden writes, "the quest is for some treasure, such as the water of life. Giants or dragons may get slain in the process because they stand between the hero and the treasure, but it is the obtaining of the treasure not the slaying of the dragon that is the hero's

[1]Campbell, pp. 245-46.

goal."[1] Jung explains this goal in more psychological terms: "The hero's main feat is to overcome the monster of darkness: it is the long-hoped-for and expected triumph of consciousness over the unconscious."[2] It is in these psychological terms that Stephen Crane's poetry relates to the hero motif with most validity.

Before we begin our detailed study of Crane's poetry, we should mention a few more important aspects of the hero archetype: various kinds of heroes which may be found in this mythological cycle, especially those relating most closely to the Crane poems.

W. H. Auden, in his book of essays entitled Secondary Worlds, studies the question of the hero (relating his study to certain works of T. S. Eliot). Auden names four kinds of human beings "of whom it may be said that their deaths are the most significant event in their lives": the Sacrificial Victim, the Epic Hero, the Tragic Hero, and the Martyr.[3] The Sacrificial Victim, he says, is a man chosen by a social group to die for the spiritual and material welfare of the group, in order that crops will grow or the wrath of the gods be appeased. Whoever the victim is, his role is decided by

[1] W. H. Auden, The Enchafèd Flood, or The Romantic Iconography of the Sea (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 61.

[2] Jung, Archetypes, p. 167.

[3] W. H. Auden, Secondary Worlds (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 15-17.

others, not by himself. When the sacrifice is finished, he is forgotten.

The Epic Hero also dies for the social group, but he is not specifically chosen by them for that purpose. "He becomes a hero, partly by fate--he is born with exceptional qualities of strength and courage--and partly by his own choice."[1] His goal is not death, but victory over the enemies of the people, and "by his valiant deeds to win immortal glory, to be remembered by generation after generation."[2]

The Tragic Hero mentioned by Auden (he names Oedipus and Macbeth as examples) has little application to Crane's poems; the Martyr, however, is sometimes found. Auden describes the Martyr as a Sacrificial Victim who chooses himself to be sacrificed and accepts his destiny. He is not chosen by the social group to be sacrificed; often they will deny that a sacrifice has been made. His sacrifice is usually not made for the sake of the social group, but for mankind. These sacrificial heroes are found to be very prevalent in Crane's poetry, possibly because they are required to die with little or no glory, even with a degree of ignominy, reinforcing Crane's usually bleak quest result.

In a further investigation of the characteristics of certain heroes, Auden again gives us some valuable concepts.

[1]Ibid., p. 16. [2]Ibid., p. 17.

In The Enchafèd Flood, he examines the character of an Ishmael, doing so in reference to Melville; the analysis is equally valuable in examining Stephen Crane's young hero. Auden says that the typical Ishmael (based on the Bible story) has several outstanding traits:[1] he is conscious of superior powers (being the first-born); he has a grievance, feeling the victim of some wrong for which he is not responsible (in the Bible, his illegitimacy); he is socially an outcast and not easily employable; if he falls in love, it is unhappy; in solitude and low company he develops qualities of courage and tough endurance (he hunts with bow and arrow); and he cherishes his loneliness and unhappiness as proof of his superiority. It is obvious that Ishmael contains a goodly amount of hybris (most heroes do); nevertheless, he is a worthy and typical hero whom we will meet often in Crane's poetry.

A point that must always be kept in mind is that, in its traditional and romantic form, the quest is successful. The hero is victorious, the dragon is killed; the hand of the princess is won. This successful quest will be characterized by images and pictures in the form of the desirable world achieved by human civilization. Many of the predominant images of the successful quest will depict

[1]Auden, Flood, p. 88.

this civilized world: the garden, the grove, domesticated animals, the city, geometrical and architectural images.[1] Images contrary to this pattern will represent the enemy, the antagonist. It is when the quest is not successful, in ironic or parodic literature, that dark and ominous images begin to dominate; it is these foreboding images we find in the poetry of Stephen Crane.

[1]Frye, Anatomy, pp. 141-46.

CHAPTER III

STEPHEN CRANE'S HERO

"The universal hero myth," writes Carl Jung, "always refers to a powerful man or god-man who vanquishes evil in the form of dragons, serpents, monsters, demons, and so on, and who liberates his people from destruction and death."[1] Such a glorious hero is noticeable for his definite absence from Stephen Crane's poems; none of the poems portray the true mythological hero. But if the glorious hero is absent from the poems, what right have we to assert the presence of the hero archetype in Crane's poems? We recall Joseph Campbell's statement that "the changes rung on the simple scale of the monomyth defy description"; thus the hero will not be the same person or have the same characteristics in his various appearances and occurrences. The quest as told by Stephen Crane is full of "changes."

The fact that a hero is present in Crane's poems can be verified by the number of times a wandering youth or man is mentioned, even if he is not the noble and glamorous overachiever described in traditional archetypal terms. Campbell says of the hero: "Frequently he is honored by

[1]Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 68.

his society, frequently unrecognized or disdained."[1] The latter treatment is typical for a Crane hero. Usually Crane blames the "society" for failing to recognize the excellence of the hero in its midst; often, though, the hero does not, in Crane's estimation, particularly deserve society's respect. At any rate, he is unrecognized, disdained, disillusioned, and usually defeated.

When we refer to Crane's "hero," of course, we are referring to many heroes. To describe the entire quest, Crane uses separate heroes in various stages of the quest; each poem concerns a different hero. By using numerous short poems, Crane is able to portray many heroes; he introduces, and promptly deflates, them as they reach various stages in the quest. Thus we might meet a hero for the first time as he has completed his quest and returns home; it is only at that specific point that Crane deals with that particular hero. If he had only one hero to follow throughout the quest, Crane's bitter version of the quest would not allow the hero to progress beyond the first stage, and there would be no story. Crane must therefore use a different hero at each stage, so that he can show defeat in all stages of the quest. We assume that a hero who has had some success prior to the stage at which we meet him is not specifically Crane's hero; he is the hero of the romantic

[1]Campbell, p. 37.

myth, whom Crane is only now meeting along the road. The hero thus encountering Stephen Crane's irony will find his quest abruptly and disastrously ended. The story does not end, however; we walk further down the road, meet a hero with whom Stephen Crane has not yet dealt, introduce them, then stand aside to watch yet another poetic hero fall.

Several characteristics of Crane's heroes are interesting; the first is anonymity. Crane's hero is never given a name. His namelessness fits Crane's style--allegorical, parable-like, and abstract. To give him a name would be to recognize him, to set him aside as an individual; some of the generalized applicability of the poems would be lost. Daniel Hoffman approves of this practice:

> In his poems [Crane] seeks the most universal statements possible of the themes which possess his imagination. Hence he must eliminate from the presentation all the particularities of the conflict which might restrict his statements only to the described events. . . . By making his human figures faceless and nameless, by pitting them against elemental forces, . . . Crane created for his poetry a symbolical form.[1]

James Cox also mentions the hero's namelessness: "Crane would not think of giving a name to one of his characters; they remain abstractions, imprisoned in the generalized form of 'a man,' 'a sage,' 'a learned man,' 'a youth,' 'a wayfarer,' and they assume reality only in so far as they are interpreted through the master consciousness of

[1]Hoffman, pp. 263-64.

the 'I' of the poems."[1] By not naming his heroes, Crane is able to portray the entire quest by using many nameless heroes, who, as a result of their universality, seem to blend into one.

What Cox calls "the 'I' of the poems" is also a hero on occasion. Sometimes the hero appears in first person, sometimes in third person. In cases in which both first and third person occur in the same poem, a problem often arises as to which is Crane's hero and which is an adversary or merely a bystander. An ambiguity can arise, as illustrated by the following poem:

> I saw a man pursuing the horizon;
> Round and round they sped.
> I was disturbed at this;
> I accosted the man.
> "It is futile," I said,
> "You can never--"
>
> "You lie," he cried,
> And ran on. (24)

In this poem, we are faced with two possibilities for the hero--the "man pursuing the horizon," or "I." The "man pursuing the horizon" seems the more likely candidate--he is on a journey, foolish or "futile" as it may prove to be. The "I," on the other hand, seems to be more practical, more serious-minded, more sensible, altogether a more admirable person; nevertheless, it is the other who is on

[1] James M. Cox, "The Pilgrim's Progress as Source for Stephen Crane's The Black Riders," American Literature, XXVIII (Jan., 1957), 483.

the quest, so that in this case we find the hero referred to in the third person. Incidentally, what are we to think of such a hero, a man intent upon an impossible and foolish task, refusing to be dissuaded from it? He may be rather typical of Crane's heroes; instead of engaging in an important and fruitful quest for some boon or gift to his people, he is occupied with a worthless and non-achievable goal. Nevertheless, he is sincerely and wholly occupied with this goal, and we are haunted by "the memorable glimpse of a man possessed, flying toward some visionary goal which so obsesses his attention and demands his whole energy that he ignores the world's claims upon him."[1]

Let us return to the question of the use of first or third person points of view to refer to the hero; Max Westbrook suggests that there are two distinct voices in Crane's poetry:

> The practice has been to assume that the poems have a single protagonist--everyman, or perhaps Crane himself--whose experiences represent man's relation to ultimate reality. The hopes and beliefs of this protagonist are sometimes real, sometimes illusory. And thus the natural conclusion has been that Crane's world view is arbitrary, unrealized. Crane's readers, however, have failed to distinguish two quite different voices in the poems. The voice of perspective, with reasonable consistency, is affirmed; the voice of arrogance, without exception, is mocked. Behind both voices lies a single and coherent standard of values.[2]

[1]Ibid., p. 484.

[2]Max Westbrook, "Stephen Crane's Poetry: Perspective and Arrogance," Bucknell Review, XI (Dec., 1963), 24-25.

These two voices will sometimes be at odds in Crane's hero poems, one appearing as the narrator "I," one as a third person "he." In these cases the reader has to distinguish between the voice of the hero and the voices of his spectators. We will find that the voice of the hero often applies to Westbrook's "voice of perspective," the sane, intelligent, and well-balanced view of the world; occasionally, the hero uses the "voice of arrogance" (for do not most heroes possess hybris?). In the case of the man chasing the horizon, however, we remember that the narrator spoke in the "voice of perspective," while the hero (in third person) possessed the "voice of arrogance." Unfortunately, there is no neat, predictable formula to apply to Crane's hero. Ambiguities often arise in the poetry, in which case multiple interpretations may have to be examined.

Our hero, then, will have several characteristics in the poems: nameless, faceless; sometimes the first person in the poem, sometimes the third; sometimes showing a sensible, affirmative view, sometimes arrogant; but always, of course, he is on a journey. It is this characteristic journey that forms the basis for our study.

The first step of the mythological hero's journey, says Joseph Campbell, is the "call to adventure." "The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or

castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure."[1] In the traditional hero story, the call comes to the hero under mysterious conditions, but in a fairly predictable manner. Circumstances surrounding the call usually include a dark forest, the Great Tree, a babbling spring, or a loathly messenger.[2] Similarities can be found in the experiences of Crane's hero. In Poem 17 we read, "There was one who sought a new road./ He went into direful thickets. . . ." These "direful thickets" correspond to Campbell's dark or grim forest. Another poem is even more explicit: "A youth in apparel that glittered/ Went to walk in a grim forest" (27). The youth there meets an assassin and fights a battle; his call to adventure was, therefore, present in the forest. These two poems not only illustrate Crane's rather ominous imagery; they also reinforce Campbell's idea of the call to adventure. In both poems the heroes specifically enter the "direful thicket" and the "grim forest" at the beginning of their journeys; their encounters in that place determine the course of their quests.

Once the hero has received his call and accepted it (occasionally a hero rejects the call, as we shall see later), his quest has begun. As we said before, the quest

[1]Campbell, p. 245. [2]Ibid., p. 51.

will have an endless number of variations; therefore the hero will behave in any number of ways. In Crane's poetry, however, we find that most of those heroes who accept the call become, in Auden's terms, the Sacrificial Victim, the Epic Hero, or the Martyr.[1]

A Sacrificial Victim appears in most poems, though not strictly in Auden's sense of a victim chosen by a social group to "die to promote its spiritual and material welfare." The hero may die a sacrificial death in these poems, but the choice is nearly always his own, meeting Auden's definition of the Epic Hero or the Martyr. Both of these types of heroes illustrate what Hoffman called "Crane's commitment to his heroic ideal of sacrificial suffering. . . ."[2]

The Epic Hero, again using Auden's definition, dies to "win immortal glory, to be remembered by generation after generation." While this degree of glory may be slightly overstated in relation to Crane's poems, we occasionally find a hero who wins a modest amount of glory:

> There were many who went in huddled procession,
> They knew not whither;
> But, at any rate, success or calamity
> Would attend all in equality.
>
> There was one who sought a new road.
> He went into direful thickets,
> And ultimately he died thus, alone;
> But they said he had courage. (17)

[1] See pp. 18-19 above.

[2] Hoffman, p. 12.

Admittedly this praise ("they said he had courage") is small reward for sacrificing oneself to "a new road"; but at least the hero is remembered and seems to be given some credit for courage. The "but" of the last line implies that his lonely death was worth the sacrifice. Read ironically, however, the final "but" could remove even that small comfort; the hero will never hear the praise of his society.

In another poem the hero dies with the idea that he will receive immortal glory:

> A youth in apparel that glittered
> Went to walk in a grim forest.
> There he met an assassin
> Attired all in garb of old days;
> He, scowling through the thickets,
> And dagger poised quivering,
> Rushed upon the youth.
> "Sir," said this latter,
> "I am enchanted, believe me,
> To die, thus,
> In this medieval fashion,
> According to the best legends:
> Ah, what joy!"
> Then took he the wound, smiling,
> And died, content. (27)

Though the youth might have been well-advised to put up more of a fight, it is the joy of the enchanted and legendary death that he seeks, with the implication of glory after death for accepting his fate bravely and nobly. He seems to feel that his death is required: he is therefore willing. The interpretation of the poem, however, hinges upon the interpretation of "best legends"; if this phrase

is read literally, the hero has by his death fulfilled the highest ideals; if read ironically, the sacrificial death is again quite meaningless, and the hero has been foolish. His death was not required, and he will receive no glory for this senseless sacrifice.

Another poem with a medieval theme illustrates the case of the hero seeking, and willing to die for, glory:

> Fast rode the knight
> With spurs, hot and reeking
> Ever waving an eager sword.
> "To save my lady!"
> Fast rode the knight
> And leaped from saddle to war.
> Men of steel flickered and gleamed
> Like riot of silver lights
> And the gold of the knight's good banner
> Still waved on a castle wall.

Again we find the sacrificial death for honor--and, in this case, for love. But these lines are only the first part of the poem; in the remaining lines we find our first definite example of Crane's bitter irony, and the second sacrificial death of the poem:

> * * * * * * * * * * * * *
>
> A horse
> Blowing, staggering, bloody thing
> Forgotten at foot of castle wall.
> A horse
> Dead at foot of castle wall. (83)

The sacrificial death in this second case is anything but noble, glorious, or honorable--it is not even remembered. The horse, dying for a cause it could not comprehend, adds a deeper dimension to the question of the heroic sacrifice.

In fact, it makes even the knight's sacrifice look foolish and pompous.

Our last example of a sacrificial Epic Hero concerns a young soldier:

> A soldier, young in years, young in ambitions
> Alive as no grey-beard is alive
> Laid his heart and his hopes before duty
> And went stanchly into the tempest of war.
> There did the bitter red winds of battle
> Swirl 'gainst his youth, beat upon his ambitions,
> Drink his cool clear blood of manhood
> Until at coming forth time
> He was alive merely as the greybeard is alive.
> And for this--
> The nation rendered him a flower
> A little thing--a flower
> Aye, but yet not so little
> For this flower grew in the nation's heart
> . . . . . (124)

The poem continues, but the lines quoted serve to illustrate the idea of heroic sacrifice and its resulting glory, even the obscure glory of an insignificant flower. In this case, the glory seems to be sincere on Crane's part. We find, again, something of the Martyr as well as of the Epic Hero, in this soldier.

These poems, then, illustrate the main type of Crane's heroes: the sacrificial death with overtones of martyrdom, possibly resulting in glory for the dead hero, but more probably not.

It is not difficult to find other examples of the hero who does not have even the possibility of glory: in the following poems, the hero is not pursuing a noble goal; he

does not fight a valiant battle; he does not die a glorious death. In these poems, he is merely a fool, discouraged and disdained. For example:

> A man toiled on a burning road,
> Never resting.
> Once he saw a fat, stupid ass
> Grinning at him from a green place.
> The man cried out in rage:
> "Ah! do not deride me, fool!
> I know you--
> All day stuffing your belly,
> Burying your heart
> In grass and tender sprouts:
> It will not suffice you."
> But the ass only grinned at him from
> the green place. (55)

The hero tries to convince the ass otherwise, but obviously the ass thinks the man a "fool"; his lot is toiling on a "burning road,/ Never resting." The "fat, stupid ass" may not be honorable or noble, but he is in a "green place," with plenty to eat and little to do. The hero declares that "it will not suffice you," but he must be discouraged. We have here an example of a hero who is not appreciated by the society he is trying to help.

Perhaps our hero's discouragement formed his state of mind in the following poem:

> Why do you strive for greatness, fool?
> Go pluck a bough and wear it.
> It is as sufficing.
>
> My Lord, there are certain barbarians
> Who tilt their noses
> As if the stars were flowers,

And thy servant is lost among their shoe-buckles.
Fain would I have mine eyes even with their eyes.

Fool, go pluck a bough and wear it. (52)

The narrator of this poem might well be the same man who "toiled on a burning road" in the previous poem, now giving advice to another hero. He has changed his mind about what will "suffice"; he now feels that his journey was worthless. Some ambiguity is present in this poem; it is difficult to assess the degree of Crane's irony concerning the "barbarians." Are they men who, in their conceit, feel themselves to be above others ("tilt their noses/ As if the stars were flowers") and are striving for "greatness" for selfish reasons? Or is the narrator simply a disillusioned hero who tried to "strive for greatness" and found it unrewarding, therefore causing him to ridicule those who still have high ideals ("tilt their noses/ As if the stars were flowers")? The latter view is perhaps the most valid, especially since the third line implies that the narrator once tried to "strive for greatness" (perhaps in the form of a medal or laurel), and found that the wearing of a bough (evidently a worthless twig) "is as sufficing." The view is that of a bitter and disillusioned idealist.

Although the next poem does not state that the hero is a fool, such an accusation is made by implication:

Three little birds in a row
Sat musing.
A man passed near that place.
Then did the little birds nudge each other.

They said: "He thinks he can sing."
They threw back their heads to laugh.
With quaint countenances
They regarded him.
They were very curious,
Those three little birds in a row. (2)

The hero is reduced to a smug, self-deceived fool under the critical eyes of the little birds; they can perform the task of singing far better than he.

Our hero is called a fool in still another poem, a poem which further illustrates the fact that sometimes the call to adventure may be confusing and vague, with an uncertain and inconclusive result. The poem is comparatively long, but its relative importance requires quoting it in its entirety:

I stood musing in a black world,
Not knowing where to direct my feet.
And I saw the quick stream of men
Pouring ceaselessly,
Filled with eager faces,
A torrent of desire.
I called to them:
"Where do you go? What do you see?"
A thousand voices called to me.
A thousand fingers pointed.
"Look! Look! There!"

I know not of it.
But, lo! in the far sky shone a radiance
Ineffable, divine,--
A vision painted upon a pall;
And sometimes it was,
And sometimes it was not.

I hesitated.
Then from the stream
Came roaring voices,
Impatient:
"Look! Look! There!"

So again I saw,
And leaped, unhesitant,
And struggled and fumed
With outspread clutching fingers.
The hard hills tore my flesh;
The ways bit my feet.
At last I looked again.
No radiance in the far sky,
Ineffable, divine,
No vision painted upon a pall;
And always my eyes ached for the light.
Then I cried in despair:
"I see nothing! Oh, where do I go?"
The torrent turned again its faces:
"Look! Look! There!"

And at the blindness of my spirit
They screamed:
"Fool! Fool! Fool!" (49)

In the first place, this poem contains some important imagery of the quest: the "black world" alien to the narrator (he does not know "where to direct my feet"); later, "the hard hills tore my flesh;/ The ways bit my feet." The journey is physically painful. The "quick stream of men," the "thousand voices," seem to be appointing our hero to obtain for them the "radiance in the far sky," but he does not understand and cannot succeed; thus to them he is a "fool." And he, too, is confused about exactly what he is to do; he reprimands himself for "the blindness of my spirit." He seems to feel that the fault is not in the "thousand voices," but in himself. We might examine the possibility that Crane

feels the "thousand voices" are themselves the fools; if they are foolish enough to believe that the "radiance in the far sky" can be captured, what right have they to require the unseeing person to try to grasp it? The "quick stream of men," the "torrent" of society should not demand such a sacrifice to satisfy their whimsical desires. Nevertheless, the hero is not a success: the people disdain him; he is frustrated with himself.

Another poem also points out that the hero who accepts the call is often confused about his goal:

> A man saw a ball of gold in the sky;
> He climbed for it,
> And eventually he achieved it--
> It was clay.
>
> Now this is the strange part:
> When the man went to the earth
> And looked again,
> Lo, there was the ball of gold.
> Now this is the strange part:
> It was a ball of gold.
> Ay, by the heavens, it was a ball of gold. (35)

We find here two points of view that may serve to illustrate the two quests: the traditional, mythological quest, and the quest as Crane views it. The traditional quest, with its attributes of nobility, bravery, and glory, may be the ball of gold. A man climbs for this ball ("the traditional symbol of ascent as an approach to truth or Grace")[1] and

[1]Hoffman, p. 165.

reaches it; it is clay, which may symbolize the quest as Crane sees it, lacking any attributes but greyness. The man returns to earth and again sees a ball of gold. The poem concludes, "Now this is the strange part:/ It was a ball of gold./ Ay, by the heavens, it was a ball of gold." Our interpretation of the poem hinges upon who the speaker is in the last three lines: the hero, or an impartial narrator. If the last three lines are spoken by the hero, then we must conclude that he has learned but little in his climb to heaven: he swears "by the heavens" (though he was up there and knows better) that the ball is gold; but since the real truth would seem to be found in the ascent (a symbol of an approach to Truth), the ball must indeed be clay. He talks himself into believing what he wants to believe.

But if, on the other hand, we feel that the narrator speaks the last three lines (assuming that his perception is correct, that the ball is really gold), then the hero is again disparaged: his climb to view the ball at closer range was worthless and incorrect, for his perception was so faulty that he saw the ball as clay. Things that look good to him from a distance lose their appeal when closely scrutinized; perhaps he is the type who wants only what he cannot have, or what someone else has.

Still a third interpretation enters at this point: possibly the hero is being commended for his ability to

regain his idealism (the "ball of gold") even when faced with the fact of its defeat (the ball of clay), and the narrator's last three lines comment on the nobility and invincibility of the hero. All things considered, the first interpretation is still the most valid, but we are awed by Crane's ability to include so many possible levels of irony in a single poem.

Another group of Crane's poems sees the hero as something of a fool: the poems in which the hero is set against the mountains. One finds that a pervasive theme throughout all of Crane's work--poetry and fiction--is that of a hostile, or at least an indifferent, nature. James B. Colvert says, "Images of a hostile Nature may take a variety of metaphorical forms--monsters, dragons, ogres, demigods, and other such grotesqueries--but the most characteristic is the form of the sinister mountain."[1] Colvert traces this image primarily in The Red Badge of Courage, but it is also found in the poetry. The "little man in conflict with the hostile mountain," Colvert says, is a "constantly recurring image" in Crane's work.[2] Maurice Bassan calls this little man the "archetypal comic pilgrim of Crane's tiny odysseys."[3] We

[1]James B. Colvert, "Stephen Crane's Magic Mountain," in Stephen Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 99.

[2]Ibid. [3]Bassan, p. 7.

will find that the "pilgrim" is often "comic" in rather tragic ways; his "tiny odysseys" are certainly not funny.

Poem 49 ("I stood musing in a black world . . ."), quoted previously, has reference to the cruel mountain ("The hard hills tore my flesh"). The hero often has to climb to the top of a mountain on his journey, with physically damaging and philosophically inconclusive results. Often the mountains seem to be threatening him, as in this poem:

> On the horizon the peaks assembled;
> And as I looked,
> The march of the mountains began.
> As they marched, they sang:
> "Aye! We come! We come!" (37)

The poem is too short to give us a definite idea of the situation, but the marching mountains are threatening and ominous.

The fact that man's defiance of nature is futile is shown in this section from the group of fragments Crane titled "Legends":

> A warrior stood upon a peak and defied the stars.
> A little magpie, happening there, desired the
> soldier's plume, and so plucked it. (72)

The soldier obviously will not go far toward defying the stars if he cannot defend his plume against a tiny magpie.

A poem which most effectively presents the image of the little man, but also grants him a degree of hope, is this one:

Once I saw mountains angry,
And ranged in battle-front.
Against them stood a little man;
Aye, he was no bigger than my finger.
I laughed, and spoke to one near me:
"Will he prevail?"
"Surely," replied the other;
"His grandfathers beat them many times."
Then did I see much virtue in grandfathers,--
At least, for the little man
Who stood against the mountains. (22)

Knowing Crane's irony, we hesitate to predict a decisive victory for this little man; after all, "grandfathers" are not going to be of much immediate help in this battle. Nevertheless, in answer to the question "Will he prevail?" the other says "Surely." Perhaps Crane shared William Faulkner's conviction that "Man will prevail." Even so, the image of a little man doing battle with huge mountains is not an encouraging one.

We find, then, several types of heroes in Crane's poems: the Epic Hero, who dies with a certain amount of glory; the Martyr, who chooses to sacrifice himself but achieves no glory; and a remaining group of heroes who are foolish, disdained, and confused. The first two of these three heroes are in keeping, to a small extent, with the traditional definition of the hero, but the last group is Crane's personal parody of the hero and his goal.

We have been discussing heroes who have heard the call to adventure and have accepted it. On occasion, a potential hero will hear a call but will refuse to follow it.

Campbell acknowledges the refusal of the call as "essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's own interest."[1] The following poem is an example of this refusal:

> Supposing that I should have the courage
> To let a red sword of virtue
> Plunge into my heart,
> Letting to the weeds of the ground
> My sinful blood,
> What can you offer me?
> A gardened castle?
> A flowery kingdom?
>
> What? A hope?
> Then hence with your red sword of virtue. (30)

While the poem may have a religious basis (specifically in reference to the "sinful blood" and the "hope"), the imagery relates to a more archetypal or mythological interpretation (the "red sword of virtue," the "gardened castle" and "flowery kingdom"). Recognizing that it would take courage to sacrifice oneself in this way, the hero nevertheless feels that "hope" is not enough to warrant his sacrifice; he therefore rejects the call.

In two other poems, the hero tentatively accepts his call and begins his quest, but gives up rather easily, which amounts to a rejection. The first poem, which Hoffman says "might have been modeled on a medieval morality play,"[2] is one of Crane's most famous:

[1] Campbell, p. 60. [2] Hoffman, p. 252.

The wayfarer
Perceiving the pathway to truth
Was struck with astonishment.
It was thickly grown with weeds.
"Ha," he said,
"I see that none has passed here
In a long time."
Later he saw that each weed
Was a singular knife.
"Well," he mumbled at last,
"Doubtless there are other roads." (88)

The hero begins his journey, even reaching "the pathway to truth," but is surprised to find the pathway abandoned. When he tries the pathway, and finds it hard going, he carelessly decides to find another, easier road. He has rejected the quest.

The second of these two poems portrays a man who has experienced life and emerged a cynic. Whether he ever actually endeavored upon a quest is uncertain, but he is definitely rejecting the call:

Once there was a man,--
Oh, so wise!
In all drink
He detected the bitter,
And in all touch
He found the sting.
At last he cried thus:
"There is nothing,--
No life,
No joy,
No pain,--
There is nothing save opinion,
And opinion be damned." (48)

He finds no redeeming qualities in life, and since he so totally rejects opinion, achievements in the public eye (honor, glory, courage) would mean nothing to him. And,

Crane says, he is "wise." Crane's ever-present irony can be found in this poem, of course, based on the interpretation of "wise." Perhaps Crane is here rejecting the cynic, the fanatic who over-reacts in all things. Perhaps Crane does not feel that "There is nothing. . . ." But whether or not this hero has Crane's admiration, the hero rejects the call. He will have none of the quest.

What of this quest? Having examined various aspects of the hero, first in tradition, then in Crane's poetry, let us look at the nature of the quest from the same two points of view. The traditional quest, as we have pointed out, is quite glorious: "The Hero undertakes some long journey during which he must perform impossible tasks, battle with monsters, solve unanswerable riddles, and overcome unsurmountable obstacles in order to save the kingdom and perhaps marry the Princess."[1] This quest is so important that, as Campbell says, "the boon that the hero brings restores the world."[2] In one poem of Crane's which we have already studied, a hint is given of this traditional view of the quest: the poem about the "youth in apparel that glittered." In this poem, the youth is content to die "in

[1]Wilfred L. Guerin et al., A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature (New York: Harper, 1966), p. 121.

[2]Campbell, p. 245.

this medieval fashion,/ According to the best legends." Though he does not marry the Princess, this hero dies in a rather glorious manner, to himself at least. However, remembering our ironic interpretation of "the best legends," we might now point out that even this hero does not "restore the world"; in fact, he dies for no cause at all except to fulfill tradition. The youth does die with joy, however; perhaps his death is not totally lacking in glory. Usually Crane sees the quest in even less glorious terms: as a menacing, a ridiculous, or even an absurd, journey.

The menacing aspects of the quest may be illustrated by the title poem from The Black Riders and Other Lines. This poem, again, does not refer specifically to the quest, but it makes use of so many archetypal and primordial images ("black," "riders," "the sea," "spear and shield," "wild shouts," "the wave of hair," "the rush upon the wind") that it lends itself readily to archetypal analysis.

> Black riders came from the sea.
> There was clang and clang of spear and shield,
> And clash and clash of hoof and heel,
> Wild shouts and the wave of hair
> In the rush upon the wind:
> Thus the ride of Sin. (1)

These "black riders" and their "ride of Sin" may be interpreted as the antagonists of the noble hero setting out upon his quest. In mythology, sin is sometimes instrumental in bringing down the wrath of the gods upon man,

necessitating a hero to overcome the curse and save Mankind. These "black riders" may represent this curse of the gods, which the heroes have to combat. Or, in an extremely ironic view, the "black riders," with their related imagery of riding and moving, may be the heroes themselves, starting out upon shameful quests (reminiscent of the Crusades) and spreading Sin over the world. Whichever view we accept (and the first is certainly more logical), we must admit that Stephen Crane used a very effective psychological and archetypal image in equating the "black riders" to "Sin" (especially if we refer "black" to the contents of the unconscious, and the capitalized "Sin" to the inhabitants of Freud's Id, the repository of our innermost drives and desires--the unconscious and the Id being synonymous).

Another menacing aspect of the quest is shown in this poem:

> Once, a man, clambering to the house-tops,
> Appealed to the heavens.
> With strong voice he called to the deaf spheres;
> A warrior's shout he raised to the suns.
> Lo, at last, there was a dot on the clouds,
> And--at last and at last--
> --God--the sky was filled with armies. (90)

This hero, like the man viewing the ball of gold, climbs toward the heavens in his journey, there to find truth and help (he "appealed to the heavens"). The heroic imagery is present--the "strong voice," the "warrior's shout"--but

his reward is not quite what he expected. The heavens he called upon, in his pride, reward him with "armies" instead of help. We do not know his fate, but the menace of those armies does not bode well for victory.

In several other poems, the quest becomes ridiculous. The following poem reinforces one of our previous views of the hero as a fool; it additionally makes a comment about the Fate which oversees all:

> If there is a witness to my little life,
> To my tiny throes and struggles,
> He sees a fool;
> And it is not fine for gods to menace fools. (13)

A quest described as "tiny throes and struggles" becomes ridiculous; the hero of the "little life" is a "fool." He resents his insignificant stance, however; he admits that he is a fool, but he reminds the gods that they are not admirable for taking advantage of such an insignificant being.

The quest to possess an unachievable goal is further characterized as ridiculous in this poem:

> There was set before me a mighty hill,
> And long days I climbed
> Through regions of snow.
> When I had before me the summit-view,
> It seemed that my labor
> Had been to see gardens
> Lying at impossible distances. (26)

Once again we find the image of climbing--the hero trying to reach the truth; indeed, he does see the truth: the fact

that, after being in "regions of snow," he is now able to "see gardens," but only to see them--they lie at "impossible distances." His climb has not been wasted, for he has seen the truth; but he will never attain his goal, the gardens.

The ridiculous aspects of the quest may also be illustrated by the poem in which a man climbs for a ball of gold. So much uncertainty and ambiguity is present in his quest, even in his achievement of the goal, that the search becomes ridiculous. Was it a ball of gold or a ball of clay? Even the hero cannot be sure; he convinces himself that it <u>was</u> a ball of gold. His definite assertion about such an uncertain perception makes the quest even more ridiculous.

Perhaps the best poem to illustrate the ridiculous quest, however, is this one, which also contains elements of the Creation:

> God fashioned the ship of the world carefully.
> With the infinite skill of an all-master
> Made He the hull and the sails,
> Held He the rudder
> Ready for adjustment.
> Erect stood He, scanning His work proudly.
> Then--at fateful time--a wrong called,
> And God turned, heeding.
> Lo, the ship, at this opportunity, slipped slyly,
> Making cunning noiseless travel down the ways.
> So that, forever rudderless, it went upon the seas
> Going ridiculous voyages,
> Making quaint progress,
> Turning as with serious purpose
> Before stupid winds.
> And there were many in the sky
> Who laughed at this thing. (6)

When the journey of Mankind through life--a quest--is described as "ridiculous voyages," "quaint progress," "turning as with serious purpose/ Before stupid winds," one feels that Crane did indeed ridicule the noble postures of man. And the final ignominy: the laughter echoing around our hero/ship as he/she tries to find a course: "there were many. . .Who laughed at this thing."

In an extension of the quest as ridiculous, Crane also viewed the quest as absurd. The call answered, the journey attempted, the goal possibly achieved--all this may be worse than ridiculous; it may be absolutely devoid of any useful meaning. "The idealistic virtues of bravery, fortitude, and integrity possess no meaning in a universe that denies the importance of man."[1] We recall several poems already quoted: the wayfarer who took the easier road, the fool who could not see the radiant vision in the sky, the knight and the horse both lying dead at the foot of a castle wall--all quests which end in futility. Some of Crane's best poems illustrate this view, including this one:

> If I should cast off this tattered coat,
> And go free into the mighty sky:
> If I should find there nothing
> But a vast blue,
> Echoless, ignorant,--
> What then? (66)

[1]Stein, p. 151.

We have the chilling thought that the hero may finally reach the sky, casting off the "tattered coat" of his long journey, only to find nothing: the emptiness and loneliness of "What then?" is frightening.

We must recall at this point the poem quoted in the first chapter, in which "A voice said: 'It is no desert.'" Again, we have a futile quest in which the hero has accomplished nothing but his own isolation and confusion. The following poem shows a similar point of view:

> A man said to the universe:
> "Sir, I exist!"
> "However," replied the universe,
> "The fact has not created in me
> A sense of obligation." (96)

This man is defying the entire universe by asserting himself, but "the world has no need for man, and can readily dispense with his strivings."[1] In addition, we have the distinct impression that the universe is more than indifferent: it will do everything in its power to see that the man has as difficult a time as possible.

A similar view of the absurdity of the quest is shown in the following poem. Again, a man climbs to reach truth and knowledge:

> When the prophet, a complacent fat man,
> Arrived at the mountain-top
> He cried: "Woe to my knowledge!
> I intended to see good white lands
> And bad black lands--
> But the scene is grey." (97)

[1]Hoffman, p. 93.

Possibly the prophet's lack of vision arises from his complacency and self-indulgence (he is "fat"); possibly he is not allowed to see the true state of affairs because of pride in his "knowledge" and his too-definite intentions: he has a pre-conceived idea of what the scene will be, and receives his just due in finding the view contrary to his expectations. But more probably he does arrive at the truth: the scene <u>is</u> grey. There are no "good white lands," no "bad black lands," and without this definite conflict between good and bad, the quest, to him, is futile.

We have examined, then, some aspects of Stephen Crane's hero and his attitudes toward the quest. We will now study in further detail various steps of the quest. As we do so, we will find aspects of the traditional quest and aspects of the quest as parody. We must always keep in mind Northrop Frye's definition of the quest: "The complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main stages: the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero."[1] Stephen Crane does not write of a successful quest; we can nevertheless follow the three main stages through his poetry.

[1]Frye, <u>Anatomy</u>, p. 187.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERILOUS JOURNEY

Once the hero has decided to accept the call to adventure, he begins his quest with a "perilous journey" into the regions of the unknown. This journey means leaving the limits of the known world and proceeding, as Campbell says, to the "threshold of adventure."

> There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark, . . . or be slain by the opponent and descend in death. . . . Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give him magical help (helpers).[1]

Having established and investigated the hero and quest in Stephen Crane's poetry, we will now proceed to establish this hero's adherence to the normal sequence of events as described by Campbell. Although Crane's quest is not the true romantic quest (in the sense of a happy ending), we nevertheless find the various stages of the quest, each stage with an ironic outcome.

The hero first meets a "shadow presence," which he must defeat or conciliate. Crane's hero conciliates this shadow by questioning him honestly:

[1]Campbell, pp. 245-46.

Mystic shadow, bending near me,
Who art thou?
Whence come ye?
And--tell me--is it fair
Or is the truth bitter as eaten fire?
Tell me!
Fear not that I should quaver,
For I dare--I dare.
Then, tell me! (7)

Since one of the major goals of Crane's hero is the quest for truth, this shadow appropriately guards the passage-way to truth; we shall examine his answer to our hero's question in the next chapter. At any rate, our hero gives a good account of himself: "Fear not that I should quaver,/ For I dare--I dare."

Since the shadow has released him to continue his journey, the hero is allowed to "go alive into the kingdom of the dark." This "kingdom of the dark" is pervasive throughout Crane's poetry; his references to darkness and blackness are numerous: "I was in the darkness" (Poem 44); ". . . she is here/ In a place of blackness" (23); ". . . the world looks black" (28); "I stood musing in a black world" (49). These poems, most of which will be discussed in other contexts, situate the hero in a world of darkness from which he tries to see to continue his journey. Having entered the kingdom of darkness, the hero's primary challenges begin. "And so it happens that if anyone--in whatever society--undertakes for himself the perilous journey into the darkness by descending, either intentionally or

unintentionally, into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth, he soon finds himself in a landscape of symbolical figures (any one of which may swallow him). . . ."[1] Since the quest is often symbolic of a journey of self-discovery, the hero investigates "the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth" by venturing into the kingdom of darkness. While we will not attempt in this paper to apply psychologically symbolic meanings to the "landscape of symbolical figures" in connection with Stephen Crane, such techniques have been used in other studies of the hero.

A significant element of the hero's journey toward his goal is what Campbell calls the "road of trials." The trials we will examine later; first let us look at the presence of the road in Crane's poetry. Once again we find an image prevalent in a great many poems, not necessarily the most important aspect of these poems, but revealing nevertheless. The repetition of these road images reinforces our assertion that the central motif of Crane's poetry is the quest. Some of the best examples are: ". . . There was one who sought a new road" (17); "There was One I met upon the road" (33); "I stood upon a highway" (34); "A man toiled on a burning road,/ Never resting" (55); "Upon the road of my life,/ Passed me many fair creatures" (60); "On the brown trail/ We hear the grind of your carts" (128); "A grey and

[1]Campbell, p. 101.

boiling street/ Alive with rickety noise" (130). As the hero proceeds down this road, he encounters varied and interesting landscapes. The excellent imagery Crane uses to describe the adventures and environment of the hero is one of the primary elements of our study.

Northrop Frye, in his book Anatomy of Criticism, uses mythology as the basis for a unified literary criticism. He divides all literature into four categories: comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony; for each category he formulates a theory of imagery. Three kinds of imagery are named: apocalyptic, demonic, and analogical.

> We have, then, three organizations of myths and archetypal symbols in literature. First, there is undisplaced myth, generally concerned with gods or demons, and which takes the form of two contrasting worlds of total metaphorical identification, one desirable and the other undesirable. The worlds are often identified with the existential heavens and hells of the religions contemporary with such literature. These two forms of metaphorical organization we call the apocalyptic and the demonic, respectively. Second, we have the general tendency we have called romantic, the tendency to suggest implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience. Third, we have the tendency of "realism" to throw the emphasis on content and representation rather than on the shape of the story. Ironic literature begins with realism and tends toward myth, its mythical patterns being as a rule more suggestive of the demonic than of the apocalyptic.[1]

In general, romantic literature follows the pattern of apocalyptic imagery, while ironic literature suggests the

[1]Frye, Anatomy, p. 140.

demonic. Comedy and tragedy, less extreme forms, show characteristics of analogical imagery.

Since Frye has elsewhere called the hero archetype "the central myth in literature," we shall perhaps find it instructive to compare that archetype as it appears in Stephen Crane's poems with Frye's theory of the imagery present in irony. We shall find in many cases a striking similarity between what Frye says ironic imagery should be, and what it actually is in Crane's ironic poetry. As we examine the imagery (remembering always that the hero is now in the "unfamiliar world" stage of his journey) we will first establish what imagery would be present in the true romantic hero story (apocalyptic imagery); next what imagery would be present in an ironic parody of that romance (demonic imagery); and finally what imagery is actually present in Stephen Crane's poems. We must remember that Crane was not attempting to follow any predetermined pattern; he simply wrote using themes that were inherent in his view of the world. For some reason, probably unconscious, the story of the hero struggling on a hostile quest appealed to him. Probably without realizing it, he used the theme repeatedly. By the same token, Northrop Frye did not specifically consider Crane's poetry. In his book he describes large patterns of literature to which application of a specific author--in this case Crane--can lend

insight into the recurrence of archetypal themes. Thus it is instructive to compare the patterns of the poet with the patterns of the theorist. Neither writer based his work on the work of the other.

In defining his two main types of imagery, Frye states: "The apocalyptic world, the heaven of religion, presents . . . the categories of reality in the forms of human desire, as indicated by the forms they assume under the work of human civilization."[1] The animal world, for instance, is represented by domesticated animals, the vegetable world by the garden or the park, and the mineral world by the city. "Demonic imagery" is defined thus:

> Opposed to apocalyptic symbolism is the presentation of the world that desire totally rejects: the world of the nightmare and the scapegoat; of bondage and pain and confusion; the world as it is before any image of human desire, such as the city or the garden, has been solidly established; the world also of . . . instruments of torture and monuments of folly.[2]

In demonic imagery the animal world might be represented by a monster or a demon; the vegetable world by a sinister forest or wilderness; the mineral world by deserts, rocks, and wasteland. Of the two types of imagery (apocalyptic and demonic, which Frye refers to elsewhere as "comic vision" and "tragic vision," respectively), the latter is so

[1]Ibid., p. 141. [2]Ibid., p. 147.

striking in Crane's poetry that parallels are immediately clear.

The imagery of the mineral, or inorganic, world is most striking. "In the comic vision," writes Frye, "the mineral world is a city, or one building or temple, or one stone, normally a glowing precious stone. . . . In the tragic vision the world is seen in terms of deserts, rocks, and ruins."[1] The inorganic world of demonic imagery will contain cities of destruction, great ruins of pride, a labyrinth or maze instead of the straight road of romance. Most significant of all for our purposes, the inorganic world of irony will include the wasteland.

Most of us are familiar with the significance of wasteland imagery from acquaintance with T. S. Eliot's poem of that name. Such imagery is therefore meaningful to us. Auden calls the desert the "nucleus of a cluster of traditional associations"[2]: as a place where water is lacking, or Ezekiel's valley of dry bones; as the wilderness outside the fertile place or city, the place where nobody desires by nature to be; as a place of punishment for those rejected by the good city, or a place of purgation for those who reject the evil city. The hero must go there, according to Auden, to "deliver the city from danger"[3] (he recalls the

[1] Frye, Fables, p. 20. [2] Auden, Flood, p. 23.
[3] Ibid., p. 24.

myth of the treasure in the desert guarded by a dragon). "The Desert has become, in fact, an image of modern civilization in which innocence and the individual are alike destroyed."[1] It is a symbol of the mechanization of society, the loss of individuality. Jung calls the desert "a wild land remote from men--an image of spiritual and moral isolation."[2] Recalling Stephen Crane's obsession with isolation, the image of the wasteland in his poetry is therefore not surprising.

One of the best poems illustrating this image is one quoted earlier in which "A voice said: 'It is no desert.'" In this poem, the wandering hero mentions "The sand, the heat, the vacant horizon" and implores God to "take me from this place!" "This place" is indeed a wasteland from which, for Crane's hero, there is no escape.

It is in this wasteland that the hero meets one of his most frightening sights:

> In the desert
> I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
> Who, squatting upon the ground,
> Held his heart in his hands,
> And ate of it.
> I said: "Is it good, friend?"
> "It is bitter--bitter," he answered;
> "But I like it
> Because it is bitter,
> And because it is my heart." (3)

[1]Ibid., p. 32. [2]Jung, Archetypes, p. 35.

Everett A. Gillis feels that Crane "celebrates integrity"[1] in this poem; the feast is bitter, but the "creature" is honest enough to show a kind of defiant dignity in paying for his sins. The poem, nevertheless, presents a stark and barren picture for a hero supposedly on a glorious journey. By calling the creature "friend," the hero-narrator affirms his kinship with the strange being and seems to imply that he, the hero, understands and shares the other's strange actions. "Loathsome, filled with corruption, the source of all sin and evil, his heart is still good to him, because it is his. That is his condition, his humanity. And he would rather taste it, though to do so is to consume himself, than renounce his humanity for those transcendent goods which require more-than-human renunciation."[2] The hero, like his "friend," asserts his own humanity in defiance of God and the Wasteland he has created for lost and isolated souls.

Another poem combines several aspects of the wasteland, including silence, serpents, and fire:

> On the desert
> A silence from the moon's deepest valley.
> Fire-rays fall athwart the robes
> Of hooded men, squat and dumb.
> Before them, a woman
> Moves to the blowing of shrill whistles
> And distant-thunder of drums
> While slow things, sinuous, dull with terrible color

[1]Everett A. Gillis, "A Glance at Stephen Crane's Poetry," Prairie Schooner, XXVIII (Spring, 1954), 76.

[2]Hoffman, p. 10.

Sleepily fondle her body
Or move at her will, swishing stealthily over the sand.
The snakes whisper softly;
The whispering, whispering snakes
Dreaming and swaying and staring
But always whispering, softly whispering.
The wind streams from the lone reaches
Of Arabia, solemn with night
And the wild fire makes shimmer of blood
Over the robes of the hooded men
Squat and dumb.
Bands of moving bronze, emerald, yellow
Circle the throat and the arms of her
And over the sands serpents move warily
Slow, menacing and submissive,
Swinging to the whistles and drums,
The whispering, whispering snakes,
Dreaming and swaying and staring
But always whispering, softly whispering.
The dignity of the accursed;
The glory of slavery, despair, death
Is in the dance of the whispering snakes. (86)

Philip Wheelwright points out that "the serpent is symbolically ambivalent; . . . by reason of its lurking deadliness [it] symbolizes death."[1] That it does so in this poem is shown in the last two lines. The presentation of snakes as an inherent feature in the wasteland is very effective in this poem; also outstanding is the remarkable imagery (the flickering fire playing over the ominous figures of the hooded men, the bands of color moving seductively over the throat and arms of the swaying woman) and the excellent use of sound (the whispering snakes and, by implication, the whispering sands; the shrill whistles and distant drums). We have the feeling that something very mysterious and

[1]Wheelwright, p. 135.

undoubtedly evil is taking place here in this wasteland, and while our hero is not specifically mentioned, he could very well have witnessed this strange scene on his travel through the desert.

Contrasted to the desert in literary imagery is the more civilized form of the fertile garden. Several times in his poems Stephen Crane presents both locales; the hero is imprisoned in the wasteland with a vision of a garden he cannot reach. One of these poems (26) has been quoted before: the hero for "long days" climbs through "regions of snow"; when he reaches the summit he sees that "my labor/ Had been to see gardens/ Lying at impossible distances." The distance between the wasteland and the garden is prohibitive, both literally and figuratively. Another poem has the same theme:

> There was, before me,
> Mile upon mile
> Of snow, ice, burning sand.
> And yet I could look beyond all this,
> To a place of infinite beauty;
> And I could see the loveliness of her
> Who walked in the shade of the trees.
> When I gazed,
> All was lost
> But this place of beauty and her.
> When I gazed,
> And in my gazing, desired,
> Then came again
> Mile upon mile,
> Of snow, ice, burning sand. (21)

The hero can see a desirable place in the distance but is not allowed to reach it, in this case even losing the vision

as punishment for his desire. The wasteland in this poem includes not only burning sand but also snow and ice, their presence in a desert suggesting something of the mysteries and difficulties of the hero's journey.

Crane's treatment of this vision of a garden in the distance is perhaps explained by Auden in his examination of the garden image. He says there are two possibilities in explanation of the garden: as a "temporary refreshment for the exhausted hero, a foretaste of his reward," or as a "magical garden, an illusion caused by black magic to tempt the hero to abandon his quest, and which, when the spell is broken, is seen to be really the desert of barren rock, or a place of horror like Calypso's island. . . . The examples which the hero actually encounters turn out to be mirages or disappointing or dangerous deserts."[1] In Crane's poetry the latter is exactly what happens.

From the imagery of the mineral world we progress to the imagery of the animal world in romantic, and in ironic, literature. "In the comic vision," says Frye, "the animal world is a community of domesticated animals, usually a flock of sheep, or a lamb, or one of the gentler birds, usually a dove." In demonic imagery, or the tragic vision, however, "the animal world is seen in terms of beasts and

[1]Auden, Flood, pp. 29-30.

birds of prey, wolves, vultures, serpents, dragons, etc."[1]

We have already noted one example of the serpent present in Crane's poetry (Poem 86 above); other examples of these demonic types are also present, including monsters and demons. Some are mentioned incidentally in poems which we have examined or will examine in more detail for other reasons. Some of the best examples include: "I stood upon a high place,/ And saw, below, many devils/ Running, leaping,/ And carousing in sin" (9); "Behold, from the land of the farther suns/ I returned./ And I was in a reptile-swarming place" (29); "Then from the far caverns/ Of dead sins/ Came monsters, livid with desire" (67). Monsters, reptiles, devils, beasts: these images are certainly the antitheses of the sheep and the lamb.

Some of Crane's animal images deserve to be examined in more detail. One pair of poems contains an effective and haunting image which belongs to the animal world. The first poem:

> The chatter of a death-demon from a tree-top.
>
> Blood--blood and torn grass--
> Had marked the rise of his agony--
> This lone hunter.
> The grey-green woods impassive
> Had watched the threshing of his limbs.
>
> A canoe with flashing paddle
> A girl with soft searching eyes,
> A call: "John!"

[1] Frye, Fables, p. 19.

* * * * * * * * *

Come, arise hunter!
Can you not hear?

The chatter of a death-demon from a tree-top. (94)

As Hoffman says, "Perhaps because so much is demanded, so little apparently given"[1] in this poem, no recent critic of Crane's poetry has discussed it. Hoffman does, giving the poem three characters (the death-demon, the hunter named John, and a girl) and a sexual interpretation (". . . the theme of this poem is the fear and guilt which accompany consummated love"[2]). He bases his interpretation on the combination of sexual imagery and death in the poem, resulting in a Freudian interpretation. Whether or not we accept his analysis (the poem may also be interpreted as simply a picture of a dying hunter whose lover is trying to find him), the image that remains with us is that of the first and last line: "The chatter of a death-demon from a tree-top." Compare that image with this:

There is a grey thing that lives in the tree-tops
None know the horror of its sight
Save those who meet death in the wilderness
But one is enabled to see
To see branches move at its passing
To hear at times the wail of black laughter
And to come often upon mystic places
Places where the thing has just been. (121)

This description is apparently of another death-demon, an image which, with its "wail of black laughter" and its

[1]Hoffman, p. 132. [2]Ibid., p. 134.

"mystic places," illustrates well Frye's concept of the demonic imagery present in ironic literature.

Another contrast to the romantic conception of animal images is present in the vulture, described in this poem:

> A row of thick pillars
> Consciously bracing for the weight
> Of a vanished roof
> The bronze light of sunset strikes through them,
> And over a floor made for slow rites.
> There is no sound of singing
> But, aloft, a great and terrible bird
> Is watching a cur, beaten and cut,
> That crawls to the cool shadows of the pillars
> To die. (125)

Religious connotations are present in this poem (the "floor made for slow rites"; the absent "sound of singing"); the compelling image, however, is the "great and terrible bird,"--"the condor, a huge and disgusting vulture which prefers carrion to live prey. Waiting for the 'beaten and cut' dog to die in the treacherously inviting shadows, this bird is the only occupant of a Heaven as vacant as the deserted temple."[1] In fact, the image of the senselessly beaten (why was he beaten, and by whom?) dog crawling to a questionable sanctuary is also demonic: it is surely the "presentation of the world that desire totally rejects."

Another animal image appearing with abundance in Crane's poetry is the horse image, not in the sense of a trusted and loyal companion to his master, but in contexts

[1]Ibid., p. 78.

of violence. We recall the "black riders from the sea"; the horse, "Blowing, staggering, bloody thing/ Forgotten at foot of castle wall"; horses pulling a hearse in Poem 130 ("Yes, let us have it over./ Drive, man, drive./ Flog your sleek-hided beasts,/ Gallop--gallop--gallop./ Let us finish it quickly"). All the animal images in Crane's poems contain the violent, destructive, anti-romantic qualities of Frye's demonic imagery.

There remain for us to examine several somewhat minor groups of images in Crane's poetry: images of the spiritual and of the unformed worlds. The spiritual world as a whole will be studied more thoroughly in Chapter Five, but a brief mention of spiritual imagery is appropriate here. In treating images of the spiritual world, Frye says,

> . . . the Eucharist symbol of the apocalyptic world, the metaphorical identification of vegetable, animal, human, and divine bodies, [has] the imagery of cannibalism for its demonic parody. . . . The imagery of cannibalism usually includes, not only images of torture and mutilation, but of what is technically known as sparagmos, or the tearing apart of the sacrificial body.[1]

Such a grotesque parody of the Eucharist is found in three of Crane's poems, the first of which we have quoted earlier in this chapter, in which a "creature, naked, bestial," holds his heart in his hands and eats it. He tears his heart out in a sacrifice that becomes a defiance, rather than a worship, of

[1] Frye, Anatomy, p. 148.

God. The second poem (49), also quoted earlier--in which "a thousand voices" call to the hero and "a thousand fingers" point toward a "radiance in the far sky" that he cannot see--also calls for the hero to become tortured and mutilated in his search for the transient vision: "So again I saw,/ And leaped, unhesitant,/ And struggled and fumed/ With outspread clutching fingers./ The hard hills tore my flesh;/ The ways bit my feet./ . . . And always my eyes ached for the light." While the mutilation may not in this case be a Eucharist symbol, the hero becomes something of a Christ figure.

The last poem concerning sparagmos is one rather personal to Crane, little connected to the hero archetype; nevertheless, it contains images of sacrifice and mutilation:

> Many red devils ran from my heart
> And out upon the page.
> They were so tiny
> The pen could mash them.
> And many struggled in the ink.
> It was strange
> To write in this red muck
> Of things from my heart. (46)

This poem perhaps has more to do with the trials of a writer than with the trials of a hero; however, it does concern a trial that is painful to the participant. In this poem--one of the few cases in which we could make this assertion with much certainty--Crane becomes his own hero. The image of the bestial creature eating his own heart is repeated as the poet's pen "mash [es]" the "red devils" running from his

heart. These "red devils" may represent Crane's most bitter poems: he calls them "red muck of things from my heart," but he is powerless to stop mashing them or writing in the muck. The universe in which this hero wanders is his own heart, and it is hostile, frightening, and strange to him. His own heart--i.e., his inward emotional struggles--supplies "red devils" and "red muck" that the poet/hero does not understand. Even the color red contributes to the expression of the struggle. It was probably Crane's most commonly-used color, symbolizing "pulsing blood and fire, the surging and tearing emotions,. . . blood, wounds, death-throes and sublimation."[1] The hero on a quest for the truth of his own heart has perhaps the most painful experience of all heroes. The sacrificial and mutilation images of this poem apply to the sacrifice of the poet/hero himself to his own psychological compulsions.

Another image connected with the spiritual world is that called by Frye the imagery of the "upper and lower worlds." The upper world, he says, is reached by ascent--the world of the gods, or the happy mountain, the tower, the winding staircase or ladder.[2] In Crane's poetry, this ascent image is usually represented by mountains: we have previously referred to several poems in which the hero

[1]J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 51.

[2]Frye, Fables, p. 58.

climbs toward a mountaintop, though often with ironic results. The lower world, Frye says, is reached by descent through caves or under water--an oracular and sinister world containing torment and punishment.[1] The "demonic epiphany," according to Frye, is "the dark tower and the prison of endless pain, the city of dreadful night in the desert, or, with a more erudite irony, the tour abolie, the goal of the quest that isn't there."[2] These images fit Crane's poetry well, especially the tour abolie. What an apt summary of the progress of Crane's hero upon his road of trials!

One group of images remains: the images of the unformed world. We note Frye's words again: "In the comic vision the unformed world is a river. . . . In the tragic vision this world usually becomes the sea, as the narrative myth of dissolution is so often a flood myth."[3] Jung has a great deal to say about the archetypal aspects of water: he calls it "a living symbol of the dark psyche, a symbol of the unconscious." He continues,

> . . . the dreamer, thirsting for the shining heights, had first to descend into the dark depths, and this proves to be an indispensable condition for climbing any higher. The prudent man avoids the danger lurking in these depths, but he also throws away the good which a bold but imprudent venture might bring.[4]

Auden writes, "The sea, in fact, is that state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilization has emerged

[1] Ibid. [2] Frye, Anatomy, p. 239.

[3] Frye, Fables, p. 20. [4] Jung, Archetypes, pp. 17-19.

and into which, unless saved by the effort of gods and men, it is always liable to relapse."[1] The sea, thus represented as dark and dangerous, is abundantly present in Crane's poetry.

Eric Solomon considers this fact: "It seems clear that the sea provided a superb objective correlative for Crane's vision of life. Here was nature's force, violent and indifferent, laid against man's endeavors, puny and tragicomic."[2] Several of Crane's poems showing this "vision of life" in relation to the sea are outstanding: for instance, the one in which "black riders came from the sea." This image illustrates Jung's statement that the sea represents the unconscious, for the black riders represent the unconscious aspects of the "ride of Sin." Another poem previously quoted (6) combines the sea image with the ship image, the poem in which the ship fashioned by God slips from its ropes and

> . . . went upon the seas
> Going ridiculous voyages,
> Making stupid progress,
> Turning with serious purpose
> Before stupid winds.

The ship image gives an added dimension to the poem; Auden explains, "the metaphor of the ship of state or society . . . is only employed when society is in peril. The ship

[1]Auden, Flood, p. 18.

[2]Solomon, p. 146.

ought not to be out of harbour. . . . The ship, then, is used as a metaphor for society in danger from within or without."[1] The society that Stephen Crane describes is indeed in peril, and this poem effectively illustrates the peril.

Another poem examines the sea from two points of view, the second of which reinforces Solomon's view of Crane's vision of life, and points forward to a later poem:

> To the maiden
> The sea was blue meadow
> Alive with little froth-people
> Singing.
> To the sailor, wrecked,
> The sea was dead grey walls
> Superlative in vacancy
> Upon which nevertheless at fateful time
> Was written
> The grim hatred of nature. (78)

The sailor is perhaps our hero, who in one of his adventures has come to know the true nature of the ocean. The poem recalls, of course, Crane's story "The Open Boat," in which the total indifference of nature is ultimately made clear to a correspondent marooned with three companions in an open boat. Again we see, in this poem, the reverse of the traditional idea of the quest; in a romantic version, the hero would gain help and compensation from nature. In Crane's ironic parody, nature is one of our hero's fiercest opponents. A more fully-developed poem, reflecting the same theme as the poem and story cited above, is this one:

[1]Auden, Flood, p. 19.

A man adrift on a slim spar
A horizon smaller than the rim of a bottle
Tented waves rearing lashing dark points
The near whine of froth in circles.
God is cold.

The incessant raise and swing of the sea
And growl after growl of crest
The sinkings, green, seething, endless
The upheaval half-completed.
God is cold.

The seas are in the hollow of The Hand.
Oceans may be turned to a spray
Raining down through the stars
Because of a gesture of pity toward a babe.
Oceans may become grey ashes,
Die with a long moan and a roar
Amid the tumult of the fishes
And the cries of the ships,
Because The Hand beckons the mice.
A horizon smaller than a doomed assassin's cap,
Inky, surging tumults
A reeling, drunken sky and no sky
A pale hand sliding from a polished spar.
God is cold.

The puff of a coat imprisoning air:
A face kissing the water-death
A weary slow sway of a lost hand
And the sea, the moving sea, the sea.
God is cold. (113)

This exceptional poem with its numerous effective and authentic images, has a great deal to do with God, but it also speaks of the sea and nature. Once again we meet our hero on a voyage: "A man adrift on a slim spar." He tries to survive; but as the poem continues, his fate becomes clear to us (with a reference to "a doomed assassin's cap"); finally the "pale hand" slides from the spar, sways slowly, and is gone. The image of the sea here presented is indeed

ominous and foreboding. Nature can be malicious ("the grim hatred of nature" in Poem 78) or indifferent ("God is cold" or "The Open Boat"); perhaps the malice is preferable to the total indifference. At any rate, nature gives the hero no help.

Our hero has perhaps now travelled far enough down the "road of trials" for us to move on to successive stages. As Campbell says, "The original departure into the land of trials represented only the beginning of the long and really perilous path of initiatory conquests and moments of illumination. Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed--again, again, and again." Elsewhere, Campbell writes:

> Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth-adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals. The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region. Or it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage.[1]

The chances for a "benign power . . . supporting" our hero are small, but we find in Crane's poetry numerous "miraculous tests and ordeals" for the hero to overcome.

Some of the tests we have mentioned before: the man wandering in the desert that "is no desert" (42); the wayfarer who, finding the pathway to truth "thickly grown with

[1]Campbell, pp. 109, 97.

weeds," decides to find another road (88); the "fool" who cannot see the radiance in the sky (49): all these heroes meet with a test they cannot pass, an obstacle they cannot surmount. It is not so with all of Crane's heroes, but with the majority.

The few heroes who are successful in their tests are so because they are helped. The place of the helper in the journey will be studied later; the next two poems, however, contain aspects of the sage or teacher who presents the hero with a test. The first poem deals with a question which the hero answers successfully:

> In a lonely place,
> I encountered a sage
> Who sat, all still,
> Regarding a newspaper.
> He accosted me:
> "Sir, what is this?"
> Then I saw that I was greater,
> Aye, greater than this sage.
> I answered him at once:
> "Old, old man, it is the wisdom of the age."
> The sage looked at me with admiration. (11)

In a second confrontation with a sage, the hero is not so successful; in fact, he learns an important lesson about heroic <u>hybris</u>:

> I met a seer.
> He held in his hands
> The book of wisdom.
> "Sir," I addressed him,
> "Let me read."
> "Child--" he began.
> "Sir," I said,
> "Think not that I am a child,
> For already I know much
> Of that which you hold.

Aye, much."
He smiled.
Then he opened the book
And held it before me.--
Strange that I should have grown so suddenly blind. (36)

The hero has met, and failed, a test, but the fact that the seer smiled perhaps implies that he will assist the hero in regaining his eyesight, his wisdom, and his pathway to the goal.

Occasionally on his travels the hero is commanded to solve an unanswerable riddle. Here is such a test:

Unwind my riddle.
Cruel as hawks the hours fly;
Wounded men seldom come home to die;
The hard waves see an arm flung high;
Scorn hits strong because of a lie;
Yet there exists a mystic tie.
Unwind my riddle. (117)

This poem was first published as an epigraph to Crane's short story, "The Clan of No-Name," so the answer to the riddle is not really relevant here; it is closely connected with the story. We do, however, see echoes of poems we have already considered (notably in the second and fourth lines); and, again, we see examples of Crane's use of mythological imagery and terminology: the "riddle," the cruel hawks, the "mystic tie." Since the unanswerable riddle is a popular test for the hero, this poem fits the category.

We have previously mentioned the fact that a hero may be aided in his quest by magical or supernatural aid in the form of a helper. According to Campbell, "For those who

have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or an old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass."[1] In fairy tales, one finds a little fellow of the wood, but in higher mythologies we find "the great figure of the guide, the teacher, the ferryman, the conductor of souls to the afterworld."[2] Campbell recalls the Navajo myth of the Spider Woman, which has special significance here. She warns the hero of four places of danger: the rocks that crush the traveller, the reeds that cut him to pieces, the cane cactuses that tear him to pieces, and the boiling sands that overwhelm him. With the exception of the cactuses, which are implicit in his extensive desert imagery, Crane specifically mentions these dangers in his poetry. In this poem, he portrays the rocks that crush:

> Many workmen
> Built a huge ball of masonry
> Upon a mountain-top.
> Then they went to the valley below,
> And turned to behold their work.
> "It is grand," they said;
> They loved the thing.
>
> Of a sudden, it moved:
> It came upon them swiftly:
> It crushed them all to blood.
> But some had opportunity to squeal. (31)

In this case the rock that crushes is the work of the same hands that are crushed; the fact that "some had opportunity

[1]Ibid., p. 69. [2]Ibid., p. 72.

to squeal" speaks of man's defiance in the face of the gods, but these men's defiance and their good intentions do not save them.

The "reeds that cut" will be recalled from a previous poem in which the wayfarer "saw that each weed/ Was a singular knife." Unfortunately, this hero did not have the Spider Woman to warn him against such dangers. References to the "boiling sands" are also found, in the poem beginning "There was, before me/ Mile upon mile/ Of snow, ice, burning sand." In another poem Crane refers to the "burning road." Thus these dangers are very real to our hero; they possibly can be averted with the help of a supernatural assistant.

Again we find ambiguity in the poems, however; sometimes the helper is valuable to the hero, and aids him in gaining success; but often, as should be the case in parody, the opposite happens: he not only does not help the hero, he makes things worse. Often referred to as a "seer," the helper sometimes helps restore the hero's sight, but Hoffman points out that ". . . seeing . . . often in Crane's poems brings . . . illusion instead of reality, or knowledge different from that which he sought, or it leads him into the wilderness instead of to the true way."[1] Such a poem is this one:

[1]Hoffman, p. 170.

A learned man came to me once.
He said: "I know the way,--come."
And I was overjoyed at this.
Together we hastened.
Soon, too soon, were we
Where my eyes were useless,
And I knew not the ways of my feet.
I clung to the hand of my friend;
But at last he cried: "I am lost." (20)

In this case, of course, the hero would have been better off without the "help" of the "learned man"; he is now irrevocably lost. The following poem is another example of the useless companion:

Love walked alone.
The rocks cut her tender feet,
And the branches tore her fair limbs.
There came a companion to her,
But alas, he was no help,
For his name was Heart's Pain. (41)

That "Heart's Pain" should be Love's closest companion shows a great deal about Crane's attitude toward love, a topic which will be examined in Chapter Five. In any case, we again have a quest in which the helper is of no help. We recall the "seer" who "held in his hands/ The book of wisdom"; when the hero observes the open book, he grows suddenly blind. As Hoffman said, the "seer" does not always help the hero to see.

In one case, the hero, evidently feeling that he is facing an impossible task and wanting to spare his helper, dismisses him:

Friend, your white beard sweeps the ground.
Why do you stand, expectant?
Do you hope to see it
In one of your withered days?
With your old eyes
Do you hope to see
The triumphal march of justice?
Do not wait, friend!
Take your white beard
And your old eyes
To more tender lands. (64)

On his quest for justice, the hero realizes that his friend is too old to see the end; kind as the old man is, he provides no help.

We find, however, one case in which nature takes the form of a helper and gives advice to the hero:

Little birds of the night
Aye, they have much to tell
Perching there in rows
Blinking at me with their serious eyes
Recounting of flowers they have seen and loved
Of meadows and groves of the distance
And pale sands at the foot of the sea
And breezes that fly in the leaves
They are vast in experience
These little birds that come in the night. (116)

Even considering that these "little birds" might represent dreams or ideas that occur to the author at night, we may still consider the possibility of some help for the hero as he continues his difficult journey down the road of trials toward the goal of his quest.

That goal comes nearer, for, as Campbell and Frye have reminded us, after the "perilous journey" comes the "crucial struggle," in which the hero "undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward."

CHAPTER V

THE CRUCIAL STRUGGLE

Our hero has gone a long way on his journey: he has heard and accepted a call, advanced past the shadow guarding the passage, gone into the kingdom of the dark, and journeyed through a world of strange forces and landscapes which test him, or, occasionally, help him on his way. Many heroes have fallen by the way at each stage. The hero who remains is now at the point where he must identify and pursue the real goal of his quest. It is possible that the goal has been unknown, even to him, during the first stages of his journey. Traditional mythology presents many possible goals for a hero. In Campbell's words:

> When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again--if the powers have remained unfriendly to him--his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft): intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom).[1]

As we study the hero in Crane's poetry, and compare his journey with that described by Campbell, we find similarities in the goal of the hero, if not in the result. As

[1] Campbell, p. 246.

the journey continues, we find that Crane's hero is searching basically for three things: truth (illumination), love (union with the goddess-mother), and God (recognition by the father-creator).

James Cox, in comparing Crane's poetry and fiction to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, says that Crane's hero is "indeed a new pilgrim who, like Christian, is in agonizing search for truth and love and mercy."[1] The search is indeed agonizing, for the results of all three quests are ambiguous and discouraging.

We shall begin by considering the search of Crane's hero for truth, or, in Hoffman's words, "the egotistic striving of man for knowledge."[2] Our hero, perhaps because of his egotism and pride, finds this search very difficult. We recall that when he was allowed to see the book of wisdom, he became suddenly blind. Blindness is often connected with this search for truth; when the hero is allowed to see, he occasionally decides he would rather not. Such an event occurs in this poem:

> I was in the darkness;
> I could not see my words
> Nor the wishes of my heart.
> Then suddenly there was a great light--
>
> "Let me into the darkness again." (44)

When the hero is allowed to see his words, and the wishes of his heart, he is overwhelmed; evidently they are so

[1]Cox, p. 485. [2]Hoffman, p. 86.

evil and frightening that he desires to return to ignorance.

We might venture a step further with this poem: since the writer's responsibility is to tell and write truth, this quest for truth may be especially applicable to Crane, the poet, again as his own hero. As he searches his own mind and heart, truth, when it is found, may be too frightening for him to deal with ("Let me into the darkness again"). Most of us can face nearly everything but the truth about ourselves; psychoanalysis is often very dangerous for this reason. Thus in the hero's search for truth, Crane himself may function as his own hero. Those poems in which the hero finds the truth, but cannot accept it, might apply specifically to the writer's dilemma.

We find other cases wherein the hero, upon meeting the truth, finds it too cruel to accept. In the next three poems he is badly disillusioned. The first poem forces the hero to confront a truth about himself:

> I stood upon a high place
> And saw, below, many devils
> Running, leaping,
> And carousing in sin.
> One looked up, grinning,
> And said: "Comrade! Brother!" (9)

The high and low places, with their related symbolism of ascent (truth) and descent (punishment), are not far enough separated to divide the hero from his "brothers." Hoffman compares this poem to Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown" for its statement about the universal sinfulness of

man. The hero, having suffered many hardships to reach this "high place," must be shocked to find that he has not overcome his sinfulness.

In another poem, the hero is sorry he has searched so diligently for truth:

> Upon the road of my life,
> Passed me many fair creatures,
> Clothed all in white, and radiant.
> To one, finally, I made speech:
> "Who art thou?"
> But she, like the others,
> Kept cowled her face,
> And answered in haste, anxiously:
> "I am Good Deed, forsooth;
> You have often seen me."
> "Not uncowled," I made reply.
> And with rash and strong hand,
> Though she resisted,
> I drew away the veil
> And gazed at the features of Vanity.
> She, shamefaced, went on;
> And after I had mused a time,
> I said of myself:
> "Fool!" (60)

In his desire for knowledge, the hero becomes too bold. He wants to learn the true nature of Good Deed, and seemingly finds that it is Vanity; after musing about this for a time, however, he calls himself a fool--according to James Cox--"precisely because he realizes too late that the very nature of good deed is its anonymity. Good deed unmasked and showing itself becomes vanity."[1] On the other hand, perhaps the true nature of good deed <u>is</u> vanity, and the hero calls himself a fool because he did not realize this sooner. He has not

[1]Cox, p. 485.

found truth after all; he has simply learned that man's motives cannot undergo close scrutiny.

A third hero comes to an unhappy end in his search for truth:

> Forth went the candid man
> And spoke freely to the wind--
> When he looked about him he was in a far
> strange country.
>
> Forth went the candid man
> And spoke freely to the stars--
> Yellow light tore sight from his eyes.
>
> "My good fool," said a learned bystander.
> "Your operations are mad."
>
> "You are too candid," cried the candid man
> And when his stick left the head of the
> learned bystander
> It was two sticks. (84)

We are assuming that the "candid man" is indeed the hero, though his behavior is not exactly admirable, for he does seem to be searching for the truth. When he dares speak to the wind, he is blown far away; when he dares speak to the stars he is blinded; when a bystander candidly assesses his behavior, his violent temper asserts itself. He denies the privilege of being candid to all but himself. He is indeed a mad fool; we have the impression that it is his frantic search for truth that has maddened him; or that he was perhaps mad in the first place to search for truth.

After it is found, truth must be communicated to others. In Stephen Crane's world, people find this impossible: a representative image is the "tongue of wood." Tongues,

always ineffectual, are referred to in several poems. Here is the first:

> Yes, I have a thousand tongues,
> And nine and ninety-nine lie.
> Though I strive to use the one,
> It will make no melody at my will,
> But is dead in my mouth. (4)

Evidently the hero-poet has no difficulty using the "nine and ninety-nine" lying tongues; only the one remaining tongue is "dead," and it is the tongue of truth which he strives to use but cannot control ("It will make no melody at my will"). Knowing truth is difficult enough; communicating it to others is more difficult still. Perhaps the problem lies in the result of trying to share truth: the poet wants to write well (melody) but cannot (at his will). Crane himself felt, toward the end of his life, that he was writing rather badly. He seemed no longer able to produce the work of high quality that he had previously done with relative ease. Perhaps this poem is a premonition that the "one" tongue that had produced The Red Badge of Courage, Maggie, and other outstanding works was limited, in danger of being "dead in my mouth."

Another poem contains tongues that are certainly mobile enough, but are still unable to communicate truth:

> There was crimson clash of war.
> Lands turned black and bare;
> Women wept;
> Babes ran, wondering.
> There came one who understood not these things.

He said: "Why is this?"
Whereupon a million strove to answer him.
There was such an intricate clamor of tongues,
That still the reason was not. (14)

The hero, inquiring about the reasons for the ravages of war, is unable to understand the answer. Several ironies are present here. In the first place, one reason he does not understand the people is that everyone talks at once, evidently in different languages ("such intricate clamor of tongues"); another reason is that the justification for war is nonsensical even if linguistically understandable. Thus "still the reason was not."

The hero meets a third situation involving tongues:

There was a man with tongue of wood
Who essayed to sing,
And in truth it was lamentable
But there was one who heard
The clip-clapper of this tongue of wood
And knew what the man
Wished to sing,
And with that the singer was content. (91)

We are encouraged that "one" understood what the man wished to sing, and that "the singer was content"; but, whatever the "tongue of wood" wished to communicate (whether truth, or poetry, or prophecies of the future), reaching an audience of one can hardly be considered successful communication.

When the hero evaluates his search for truth, he perhaps must conclude that truth is beyond reach. We remember the fat complacent prophet who, from the mountain-top

where he intended to see white and black lands, found that "the scene is grey." The hero often does not find what he expects, at least in such clear-cut terms as he might desire. The elusiveness of truth is expressed in this poem:

> "Truth," said a traveller,
> "Is a rock, a mighty fortress;
> Often have I been to it,
> Even to its highest tower,
> From whence the world looks black."
>
> "Truth," said a traveller,
> "Is a breath, a wind,
> A shadow, a phantom;
> Long have I pursued it,
> But never have I touched
> The hem of its garment."
>
> And I believed the second traveller;
> For truth was to me
> A breath, a wind,
> A shadow, a phantom,
> And never had I touched
> The hem of its garment. (28)

The narrator is surely our hero, for he knows how difficult the acquisition of truth is: the world is not black, but grey, especially from "its highest tower"; it is a shadow easily destroyed, like Good Deed, by too-diligent pursuit; it is a phantom, almost impossible to communicate to another. The search for truth is worthwhile, but discouraging.

The poem about the "man pursuing the horizon" has often been interpreted by critics to symbolize the search for truth and "to show that man's efforts are futile."[1]

[1] Westbrook, "Perspective and Arrogance," p. 32.

This interpretation is perhaps a bit too fatalistic, for we determined that the "man pursuing the horizon" was not our hero. Nevertheless, "he who seeks truth is derided. You can never find what you seek; always it is beyond the horizon."[1] Like the man frantically searching for the "radiance in the far sky," the seeker is too blind to see the thing he desires. "Truth cannot be grabbed by the hands of arrogance or codified by the rules of institutions. It must be approached humbly through the oblique language of symbolic experience."[2] Our hero has been both humble and proud in his search for truth, but he has met with little success. As an allegory for the writer's dilemma, the search to find, to face, and then to communicate truth is perhaps equally difficult, and often equally unsuccessful, for the poet.

The search of the hero for love is in the best traditions of the myth of the quest. The "ultimate adventure," according to Campbell, "is commonly represented as a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World. This is the crisis at the nadir, the zenith, or at the uttermost edge of the earth. . . ."[3] In Northrop Frye's terminology, love is one of the archetypes

[1] R. W. Stallman, ed., Stephen Crane: An Omnibus (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 570.

[2] Westbrook, p. 33. [3] Campbell, p. 109.

of romance: "Marriage or some equivalent consummation belongs to the comic vision."[1] In the irony of Stephen Crane's poetry, however, love and marriage are not so ideal. "The demonic erotic relation becomes a fierce destructive passion that works against loyalty or works against the one who possesses it. It is generally symbolized by a harlot, witch, siren, or other tantalizing female, a physical object of desire which is sought as a possession and therefore can never be possessed."[2]

The destructiveness of love in Crane's poems is easily documented. His "love" poems include elements of death, doom, sin, suffering, doubt, and hopelessness. In only one or two isolated instances is love the least bit happy, and then usually only in a transitory way. To Crane, "even love is a dying, not sacrificially but in total isolation."[3] His first love poem illustrates some of these tendencies:

> Should the wide world roll away,
> Leaving black terror,
> Limitless night,
> Nor God, nor man, nor place to stand
> Would be to me essential,
> If thou and thy white arms were there,
> And the fall to doom a long way. (10)

At first glance, this poem may seem to say some positive things about love: he considers the woman's "white arms"

[1] Frye, Fables, p. 20.

[2] Frye, Anatomy, p. 149.

[3] Hoffman, p. 271.

valuable to him above all else. Nothing, he says, is essential to him if the woman is there, and if it takes a long time to reach doom. Upon closer scrutiny, however, we see that Crane may be saying something very different. The images found in the poem are not typical of love poems: "black terror," "limitless night," "the fall to doom." The poem has created a desolate world; although the white arms might save him from doom, "what the poem really says is that he is doomed and fallen because he loves her."[1] Whichever interpretation we accept, the result of love is not the happy one of the romantic quest. This impression recurs in other poems; love is repeatedly connected with sin and doom, the very antitheses of romance.

The long poem "Intrigue" (103) contains many images relating love to doom and death. The second stanza says:

> Thou art my love
> And thou art a storm
> That breaks black in the sky
> And, sweeping headlong,
> Drenches and cowers each tree
> And at the panting end
> There is no sound
> Save the melancholy cry of a single owl
> Woe is me!

The sexual imagery in this poem is destructive and violent; though the rainstorm should symbolize fertility and renewal, instead it is "black," "melancholy," and woeful. In other comparisons from "Intrigue," Crane says of his love, "thou

[1]Ibid., p. 125.

art the ashes of other men's love" (a reference to a harlot), "thou art a wretch," "thou art a priestess/ And in thy hand is a bloody dagger/ And my doom comes to me surely/ Woe is me." The poem concludes:

> Thou art my love
> And thou art death
> Aye, thou art death
> Black and yet black
> But I love thee
> I love thee
> Woe, welcome woe, to me.

The destructiveness of love is further shown in the last lines of another poem (108): "I said: 'Sweetheart.' / Thou said'st: 'Sweetheart.'/ And we preserved an admirable mimicry/ Without heeding the drip of the blood/ From my heart."

The themes of the wasteland, sexual love, and sin are often joined in these "love" poems. In our hero's journey across the desert, we remember the scene where a tribe "Of hooded men, squat and dumb" watch a woman snake-dancer sensuously perform "the dance of the whispering snakes." One stanza from "Intrigue" seems to imply a snake-image: "And thou art a skull with ruby eyes. . . ." Often a phallic symbol, the snake is used by Crane in connection with a woman, in which case "the snake image . . . taken in its theological signification is the agent of man's fall, the inciter to sin."[1] It is certainly a creature native to the wasteland shown in this poem:

[1]Ibid., p. 130.

Places among the stars,
Soft gardens near the sun,
Keep your distant beauty;
Shed no beams upon my weak heart.
Since she is here
In a place of blackness,
Not your golden days
Nor your silver nights
Can call me to you.
Since she is here
In a place of blackness,
Here I stay and wait. (23)

The "place of blackness" is a contrast to the paradise shown in the rest of the poem, a paradise normally inhabited by love. Another poem, filled with beautiful imagery, also ends with a conviction of love's destruction:

I explain the silvered passing of a ship at night,
The sweep of each sad lost wave
The dwindling boom of the steel thing's striving
The little cry of a man to a man
A shadow falling across the greyer night
And the sinking of the small star.

Then the waste, the far waste of waters
And the soft lashing of black waves
For long and in loneliness.

Remember, thou, O ship of love
Thou leavest a far waste of waters
And the soft lashing of black waves
For long and in loneliness. (81)

Again we find the connection of black with water (both symbols of the "evil" unconscious), reminiscent of the "black riders" from the sea.

Love hurts our hero in many ways. One poem (105) ends "Ah, God--that I should suffer/ Because of the way a little finger moved." Or, similarly, "I weep and I gnash/ And I

love the little shoe/ The little, little shoe" (104). Each reminder of his love is agonizing to him, not joyful.

A lover trying to approach his beloved confronts the same problem that befell the wayfarer who found each weed on the pathway of truth a "singular knife": he must turn back. The second stanza of poem 40 illustrates physical pain:

> Aye; but, beloved
> When I strive to come to you,
> Man's opinions, a thousand thickets,
> My interwoven existence,
> My life,
> Caught in the stubble of the world
> Like a tender veil,--
> This stays me.
> No strange move can I make
> Without noise of tearing.
> I dare not.

In three poems Crane personifies love, and we again see images of the journey; again the images are destructive. Poem 41, previously quoted, personified Love as walking alone. "The rocks cut her tender feet,/ And the brambles tore her fair limbs." When she gains a companion, he is of no help, "For his name was Heart's Pain." In two more poems love is personified, but not in feminine, nor in pleasant, images:

> I heard thee laugh,
> And in this merriment
> I defined the measure of my pain:
> I knew that I was alone,
> Alone with love,
> Poor shivering love,
> And he, little sprite,

Came to watch with me,
And at midnight
We were like two creatures by a dead
camp-fire. (109)

That "dead camp-fire" seems to symbolize Crane's version of love. He has elsewhere referred to his lover as "the ashes of other men's love"; the campfire, ordinarily used for heat, is dead, as the warmth usually provided by love is cold in Crane's poetry. Our hero sits in the wasteland at midnight alone.

Love at noon, however, has little more to offer:

Love met me at noonday,
--Reckless imp,
To leave his shaded nights
And brave the glare,--
And I saw him then plainly
For a bungler,
A stupid, simpering, eyeless bungler,
Breaking the hearts of brave people
As the snivelling idiot-boy cracks his bowl,
And I cursed him,
Cursed him to and fro, back and forth,
Into all the silly mazes of his mind,
But in the end
He laughed and pointed to my breast,
Where a heart still beat for thee, beloved. (111)

The demonic imagery of this poem is striking: the "glare" of noonday, the description of the "bungler" and the "snivelling idiot-boy," the "mazes." Love, far from being the glorious goal of a noble quest, has reached its lowest point.

In one poem, though--just one--are we given a shred of hope for the hero in search of love. In this poem Crane does see the lover as "active, warlike, loyal, and brave.

The governing metaphor is appropriately chivalric, for it is part of the knightly code to rescue the beloved."[1] This poem, quoted earlier in its entirety, begins "Fast rode the knight/ With spurs, hot and reeking/ Ever waving an eager sword./ 'To save my lady!'" In this one poem, at least, our hero is able to complete his quest for love; he dies, of course, but considering the adventures of other heroes who lived to participate in "love," with its overtones of guilt, sin, and doom, his is the preferable fate.

Perhaps on the third quest our hero will have better success. The search for the father, however, also has its dangerous and terrifying aspects, one of which Campbell calls the aspect of the "ogre-father."[2] The father will probably be a tyrant; as he created, so can he destroy. Campbell explains:

> Stated in direct terms: the work of the hero is to slay the tenacious aspect of the father (dragon, tester, ogre king) and release from its ban the vital energies that will feed the universe. This will be done either in accordance with the Father's will or against his will; he may choose death for his children's sake, or it may be that the Gods impose the passion upon him, making him their sacrificial victim. These are not contradictory doctrines, but different ways of telling one and the same story; in reality, Slayer and Dragon, sacrificer and victim, are of one mind behind the scenes, where there is no polarity of contraries, but mortal enemies on the stage, where the everlasting war of the Gods and the Titans is displayed.[3]

[1]Ibid., p. 142. [2]Campbell, p. 129.

[3]Ibid., pp. 352-53.

Thus the hero sets out looking for his father; in Crane's case, the hero looks for God and for His recognition. He finds the ogre-father and tries to destroy his destructive tyranny and become his son again. In some cases he finds a father greatly changed from his former self (in this case as a result of organized religion); some of the heroes, to their horror, cannot find a father; in some cases, the father refuses to recognize the hero. In all variations of the quest for the father, the hero undergoes the "supreme ordeal": he emerges confused and puzzled. As Edwin Cady states, "much of Crane's most intimate expression, particularly his religious poetry, suggests that, for all the mind of man can tell, God, intentionally or not, is playing games with us."[1]

The most striking father-figure in Crane's poems is the ogre-father: the vengeful, jealous tyrant whose pride and egotism destroy everything around him. Such a tyrant speaks in this Biblical passage: "And the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the heads of the children, even unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Crane wrote this poem in response:

> Well, then, I hate Thee, unrighteous picture;
> Wicked image, I hate Thee;
> So, strike with Thy vengeance
> The heads of those little men
> Who come blindly.
> It will be a brave thing. (12)

[1]Cady, p. 94.

Part of the hatred in this poem is undoubtedly a result of fear; the hero will soon be a "little" man coming to face his father, and he fears for his head.

Another tyrant, and the power he holds over his subjects, is shown in this poem:

A god in wrath
Was beating a man;
He cuffed him loudly
With thunderous blows
That rang and rolled over the earth.
All people came running.
The man screamed and struggled,
And bit madly at the feet of the god.
The people cried:
"Ah, what a wicked man!"
And--
"Ah, what a redoubtable god!" (19)

Perhaps this poem shows the result of the little man (our hero) meeting the "wicked image" of the last poem. The sad thing is that the people immediately take the side of the god, leaving the man to struggle in vain.

Presented in the next poem is a God-Father who silently watches our hero search for Him; He does not deign to answer until it is in his best interests to do so; then his answer is vicious:

A spirit sped
Through spaces of night;
And as he sped, he called:
"God! God!"
He went through valleys
Of black death-slime,
Ever calling:
"God! God!"
Their echoes
From crevice and cavern
Mocked him:
"God! God! God!"

Fleetly into the plains of space
He went, ever calling:
"God! God!"
Eventually, then, he screamed,
Mad in denial:
"Ah, there is no God!"
A swift hand,
A sword from the sky,
Smote him,
And he was dead. (68)

The utter cruelty of this "swift hand . . . from the sky" is so frightening that the ogre-father takes on even more fearsome attributes. The hero, however, finds courage to face, and even to defy, him. In the following poem of three parts, the first two parts defy this terrible aspect of the father:

I

Blustering god,
Stamping across the sky
With loud swagger,
I fear you not.
No, though from your highest heaven
You plunge your spear at my heart,
I fear you not.
No, not if the blow
Is as lightning blasting a tree,
I fear you not, puffing braggart.

II

If thou can see into my heart
That I fear thee not,
Thou wilt see why I fear thee not,
And why it is right.
So threaten not, thou, with thy bloody spears,
Else thy sublime ears shall hear curses.

We have a memorable picture of our brave little hero daring to shout his disdain to this "puffing braggart" even in the face of the "swift hand" of the last poem. How can the hero dare this? Perhaps he hopes to kill the "tenacious aspect"

of the father, thereby leaving a father who created him and who he knows loves him, and from whom he has nothing to fear. Such a father is portrayed in the last part of the above poem:

III
Withal, there is one whom I fear;
I fear to see grief upon that face.
Perchance, friend, he is not your god;
If so, spit upon him.
By it you will do no profanity.
But I--
Ah, sooner would I die
Than see tears in those eyes of my soul. (53)

It is clear that two pictures of God are found in Crane's poems: a vengeful and cruel God, and a loving, pitying God. Critics have long accused Crane of ambiguity, contradiction, and inconsistency because two such different faces of God are shown. But if God is interpreted as the Father, and the hero is in search of a father, it becomes clear that the two pictures of the Father are logical and orderly. A tyrant-ogre-father first appears to the hero as a sort of test; the merit of the hero is determined by whether or not he can overcome the evil aspects and gain the recognition, and the respect, of the father, who, as in mythology, will then shower the son with love, kindness, and (in mythology) material riches, even his kingdom. The two aspects of the father, perhaps before and after his recognition of his son, are shown in the following two poems.

The livid lightnings flashed in the clouds;
The leaden thunders crashed.
A worshipper raised his arm.
"Hearken! Hearken! The voice of God!"

"Not so," said a man.
"The voice of God whispers in the heart
So softly
That the soul pauses,
Making no noise,
And strives for these melodies,
Distant, sighing, like faintest breath
And all the being is still to hear." (39)

The "man" who hears the "voice of God" whispering in his heart is, of course, our hero; when a Father-God recognizes His son, he would indeed whisper in his heart for "all the being" to hear. Another poem is similar:

A man went before a strange god,--
The god of many men, sadly wise.
And the deity thundered loudly,
Fat with rage, and puffing:
"Kneel, mortal, and cringe
And grovel and do homage
To my particularly sublime majesty."

The man fled.

Then the man went to another god,--
The god of his inner thoughts.
And this one looked at him
With soft eyes
Lit with infinite comprehension,
And said: "My poor child." (51)

This kind, pitying God is an image usually associated with a father. His "infinite comprehension" is illustrated in this poem:

There was One I met upon the road
Who looked at me with kind eyes.
He said: "Show me of your wares."

And I did,
Holding forth one.
He said: "It is a sin."
Then I held forth another.
He said: "It is a sin."
Then I held forth another.
He said: "It is a sin."
And so to the end.
Always He said: "It is a sin."
At last, I cried out:
"But I have none other."
He looked at me
With kinder eyes.
"Poor soul," He said. (33)

Though this hero cannot meet the high standards required of man by God, God does have compassion on him and is far from the "puffing braggart" of the ogre-father.

Stephen Crane's personal struggles in connection with God have been thoroughly studied by Daniel Hoffman. Crane's father was a Methodist minister, his mother descended from a long line of clergy (her father and brothers were all Methodist ministers). He was thus widely exposed to religious teachings and influences. Hoffman examines Crane's conflict between the strict, fundamental Methodism of his mother's family, and the more gentle, forgiving religion of his father. Crane's apparent eventual choice of a loving God rather than a damning God is shown in the reaction of the hero in his poems to the two pictures of God. Although the hero does not conclusively find a God-father in the poems, he is at least shown a measure of love and pity by the occasionally merciful God of his quest.

This quest, the search for the father, would then seem occasionally quite rewarding. The father, at first, may seem to be a tyrant or ogre, but when convinced that the hero is his son, he shows love and compassion, becoming a true father. Unfortunately, however, such is not always the case. Occasionally the hero finds that his father has changed to the extent that he can no longer recognize his son. If the father is equated with the Christian God, and the religion organized around him with ritual and custom, God becomes so institutionalized and regimented that He can no longer be recognized. For instance, this poem:

> You tell me this is God?
> I tell you this is a printed list,
> A burning candle and an ass. (85)

God is likewise unrecognizable in this setting:

> There was a great cathedral.
> To solemn songs,
> A white procession
> Moved toward the altar.
> The chief man there
> Was erect, and bore himself proudly.
> Yet some could see him cringe,
> As in a place of danger,
> Throwing frightened glances into the air,
> A-start at threatening faces of the past. (63)

God is not present in this cathedral, and the "chief man" cringes for fear that He will suddenly appear and call for an accounting. The hero must look elsewhere. In another poem, Crane presents a memorable image of a church where God is conspicuously absent:

Two or three angels
Came near to the earth.
They saw a fat church.
Little black streams of people
Came and went in continually.
And the angels were puzzled
To know why the people went thus,
And why they stayed so long within. (32)

If this is God's house, it is soon apparent that God is not here. Perhaps the hero came here looking for his father and did not find him. Perhaps he looked farther and farther, and longer and longer, and soon began to fear that he would never find his father. Terrible as the ordeal may be when the father is faced, a quest-world without a father is even more terrifying: "If I should find nothing there/ But a vast blue,/ Echoless, ignorant,--/ What then?" (66) The emptiness of the world without God has far-reaching consequences. This poem depicts some of them:

God lay dead in Heaven;
Angels sang the hymn of the end;
Purple winds went moaning,
Their wings drip-dripping
With blood
That fell upon the earth.
It, groaning thing,
Turned black and sank.
Then from the far caverns
Of dead sins
Came monsters, livid with desire.
They fought,
Wrangled over the world,
A morsel.
But of all sadness this was sad,--
A woman's arms tried to shield
The head of a sleeping man
From the jaws of the final beast. (67)

The image of a woman's arms shielding a man from doom (in Poem 10) reappears in this poem. Perhaps this protective image gives a brief respite from a picture of anarchy and terror (with excellent demonic imagery), but even the woman's arms are tinged with implications of doom from earlier poems. The "final beast" will have the last word. If God is dead, the world, and its hero, are lost.

The hero is primarily seeking recognition from his father. One of the first things the mythological hero says to his mother as a child is "Who is my father?" and the search for recognition begins.[1] We have discussed quests in which the father cannot be found or is dead. What if the hero succeeds in finding the father, but is refused recognition? Such an eventuality occurs in poems which illustrate the indifference of God, or poems where "the Blustering God wears as his mask the visible forms of nature."[2] We recall the differing aspects of the sea to the maiden, viewing it from the shore, and to the sailor, stranded upon its threatening surface. We recall the fate of the "man adrift on a slim spar"; God was present and could have averted the tragedy, but "God is cold." This poem, says Hoffman, is Crane's "most complete denial of God--not only of the God of vengeance, but, worse, of the God of mercy.

[1]Campbell, p. 346. [2]Hoffman, p. 90.

What the observer interprets is a truth of terrible simplicity; Nature endures--and [God] takes not the slightest heed. . . ."[1] "The coldness of the waters has become the coldness of God, and all that can matter to man is the integrity with which he meets the perils in life and the death from which an uncaring Deity will not save him."[2]

Let us have one last glimpse of our hero:

> Walking in the sky,
> A man in strange black garb
> Encountered a radiant form.
> Then his steps were eager;
> Bowed he devoutly.
> "My Lord," said he.
> But the spirit knew him not. (59)

We can almost sense the anticipation of this man (perhaps the "strange black garb" is that of a clergyman, a proponent of organized religion; but he is a humble wanderer just the same). After a long and arduous journey, he sees his father in the distance. His steps become eager, his bowing becomes devout. After all this time, finally to see his father! "But the spirit knew him not." And so ends the quest for the father.

The three quests of Stephen Crane's hero, then, are unsuccessful. His attempt to find truth, love, or his father (his own identity) end in disappointment and disillusion. Stephen Crane, if he occasionally takes the part of his own hero, might be objectifying his own struggles

[1]Ibid., p. 96. [2]Ibid., p. 99.

in life. The early death of his father, a minister; his unsatisfactory love affairs; his struggles to find a suitable medium of expression--these problems are all well-documented in his biographies. It is perhaps valid to suggest that his own struggles are being subconsciously projected in the young wanderer of the hostile universe who meets myriad disappointments and rejections. At any rate, the world is a bitter and cruel place for the young man wandering through Stephen Crane's poems.

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF THE QUEST

The final task of the hero is the return after the quest. "If the powers have blessed the hero," according to Campbell,

> he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world.[1]

In traditional mythology, of course, the hero is always ultimately successful; no matter how many dangerous situations he has encountered, he survives to return to his people. Even death can be overcome: death at any of the various stages of the journey is often merely a device to gain admittance into the kingdom of darkness, or to escape a foe temporarily before undergoing rebirth. The traditional hero is practically immortal. He will return to his people and "restore the world."

As we have followed Stephen Crane's hero on his journey, we have found negations and reversals of the traditional myth at each stage of the journey. We have established that the journey of Crane's hero will not be the successful quest of romance. We did find occasional

[1]Campbell, p. 246.

encouraging words and half-way victories in some battles, but for the most part the quest was disillusioning and unsuccessful. It is in this last stage of the quest, however, that we are convinced of the real irony and bitterness of Stephen Crane's point of view, for the end of the quest is wholly unsatisfactory. We recall Crane's method of picking up the romantic hero at each stage of the journey and promptly defeating him. Even with this technique, we find few heroes at this last advanced stage. The hero is so seldom allowed to finish the quest that we find few examples of the returning hero in Crane's poetry. The examination of the end of the quest is therefore necessarily brief.

Our discovery of the unsatisfactory ending of the quest in Crane's poetry is, of course, no surprise. His poetry is well-known for its irony. What is surprising is the precision with which it fits the opposite of the outcome of the romantic quest. "The central principle of ironic myth," says Northrop Frye, "is best approached as a parody of romance."[1] The parody dominates this poetry.

In relating literature to mythology, Frye applies each of the four categories of literature--comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony--to the hero archetype. He divides them in this manner:

> The four mythoi that we are dealing with, comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony, may now be seen as

[1]Frye, Anatomy, p. 223.

> four aspects of a central unifying theme. Agon or conflict is the basis or archetypal theme of romance, the radical of romance being a sequence of marvellous adventures. Pathos or catastrophe, whether in triumph or in defeat, is the archetypal theme of tragedy. Sparagmos, or the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world, is the archetypal theme of irony and satire. Anagnorisis, or recognition of a newborn society rising in triumph around a still somewhat mysterious hero and his bride, is the archetypal theme of comedy.[1]

We readily recognize sparagmos as the unifying principle behind the hero motif as it appears in Stephen Crane's poetry. We have documented many cases of the absence of heroic action, the confusion and disorganization that accompanies our hero throughout his journey. When we approach the end of the quest, however--when the hero is supposed to return to his world, claim his victory and save his people--some of the clearest examples of Stephen Crane's parody of the romantic myth are to be found.

In the first place, even the traditional hero encounters difficulties in returning to his people. Campbell mentions the "refusal of the return," the fact that the hero, upon being admitted to truth and knowledge, upon gaining his boon, may find himself in a world so perfect that he has no desire to leave. Or, if he does want to leave, he may find mighty forces opposing him. Eventually, however, he reaches the return threshold. It may be at

[1]Ibid., p. 192.

this point that he encounters his greatest difficulty:

> How teach again, however, what has been taught correctly and incorrectly learned a thousand thousand times, throughout the millenniums of mankind's prudent folly? That is the hero's ultimate difficult task. How render back into light-world language the speech-defying pronouncements of the dark? How represent on a two-dimensional surface a three-dimensional form, or in a three-dimensional image a multi-dimensional meaning? How translate into terms of "yes" and "no" revelations that shatter into meaninglessness every attempt to define the pairs of opposites? How communicate to people who insist on the exclusive evidence of their senses the message of the all-generating void?[1]

It is precisely this problem of communication that renders our hero's return so difficult. Let us consider two explicit examples of this difficulty of communication. The first does not specifically mention a quest and a message, but these factors may be readily inferred. It may be read that a hero has learned a truth of great importance and desires to teach it to his people:

> Once there came a man
> Who said:
> "Range me all men of the world in rows."
> And instantly
> There was terrific clamor among the people
> Against being ranged in rows.
> There was a loud quarrel, world-wide.
> It endured for ages;
> And blood was shed
> By those who would not stand in rows,
> And by those who pined to stand in rows.
> Eventually, the man went to death, weeping.
> And those who stayed in bloody scuffle
> Knew not the great simplicity. (5)

As this hero returns from his quest, he asks only that people be ranged before him to hear his truth--a simple

[1]Campbell, pp. 217-18.

request, and one that would greatly benefit the people. To the hero, the question of "ranging in rows" is the least of the matter. But to the people, it becomes the ultimate question, until the hero becomes discouraged of ever telling what he has learned, and dies weeping. The hero in this poem might again be a personification of the poet; in this case, his "audience" misunderstands, or opposes, even the simplest request. The request itself may have been an afterthought on the hero's part, simply a means to an end. The "audience," however, confuses the means with the end; this poet is forever frustrated. It is indeed difficult to transmit the "boon" gained from the quest to such unreasonable people as mankind.

The second poem deals with a hero who, returning, does not recognize the land he has left. Two explanations are possible: either he has seen something so much better that he cannot re-adjust to the realities of the world to which he returns; or he is now for the first time seeing the world in its reality as a result of what he has learned. Campbell remarks on the hero's problems in seeing again the world that he previously inhabited:

> The first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life. Why re-enter such a world? Why attempt to make plausible, or even interesting, to men and women consumed with passion, the experience of transcendental bliss?[1]

[1] Ibid., p. 219.

In the traditional story, the hero, with some type of divine help, overcomes the problem of re-adjustment; in Crane's version, he does not. Here is Crane's poem:

> Behold, from the land of the farther suns
> I returned.
> And I was in a reptile-swarming place,
> Peopled, otherwise, with grimaces,
> Shrouded above in black impenetrableness.
> I shrank, loathing,
> Sick with it.
> And I said to him:
> "What is this?"
> He made answer slowly:
> "Spirit, this is a world;
> This was your home." (29)

Obviously the hero will not be able to communicate his gift in such a "reptile-swarming place . . . Shrouded above in black impenetrableness." Faced with such a homecoming, the hero must truly feel that his entire journey to "the land of the farther suns" has been in vain.

Another poem previously mentioned shows the hero returning from his journey with something to communicate that the people cannot understand:

> There was a man with tongue of wood
> Who essayed to sing,
> And in truth it was lamentable
> But there was one who heard
> The clip-clapper of this tongue of wood
> And knew what the man
> Wished to sing,
> And with that the singer was content. (91)

When we previously discussed this poem, the hero was interpreted as the "one who heard," the one able to understand truth. Let us now consider the interpretation that the

hero returning from his journey is the "man with tongue of wood/ Who essayed to sing." He makes a "lamentable" sound that no one can understand--except one person. This one "knew what the man wished to sing"; perhaps truth has been communicated to one person. Surely this is a major disappointment for the hero, however; he has been through a difficult experience, has learned a great deal, and can now save mankind. It is at this point, however, that he meets Stephen Crane's irony: to have only one understand his message would be a failure. He was previously unable to communicate to "all men of the world" when they refused to stand in rows, however; perhaps one is better than none. At any rate, "with that the singer was content." Perhaps we find in this last line the greatest irony: the hero is "content" with communicating his knowledge to one person, indeed a far cry from his potential to "restore the world." The hero's ultimate goal throughout the entire ordeal--to bring a boon to his people--has failed to become actuality in Stephen Crane's poetry.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Stephen Crane has presented, consciously or not, the ancient motif of the hero and his quest throughout his poetry. In approximately 75 per cent of his poems reference has been made to an anonymous wanderer struggling for the secret of the universe. This numerical balance is interesting, but unless it gives us insight into Stephen Crane's work as a whole, it is perhaps not especially enlightening. What do we learn of Stephen Crane's work from our study of his use of the hero?

We have, of course, found a fairly predictable pattern of events in our study of this journey. The hero, in tradition and in Crane's poetry, follows a basic course of action: he hears a "call to adventure," which he accepts or rejects; he approaches the "threshold of adventure," encountering a shadow presence which he conciliates or defeats; he embarks upon the "road of trials," which presents him with ordeals and tests, but occasionally gives him supernatural aid; he enters a land of strange landscapes and forms as he searches for the goal of his quest; he reaches his goal, obtains it, and returns home to communicate the truth. The difference between the traditional

quest and Crane's quest, however, is that the mythological hero succeeds, while Crane's heroes ultimately fail.

Crane's hero does not necessarily fail immediately. At each stage of the journey some encouragement occurs, so that a few heroes continue their journeys and we meet them in the next stage. In some cases, too, Crane simply introduces the hero at a later stage in the quest. At each stage, however, there are many heroes who fall by the wayside. Their defeats come in the form of rejection of the call, lost ways along the road, inferior help from supposedly supernatural helpers, a too-elusive goal, and, at all stages, death. Death for the traditional hero, as we have mentioned before, may simply be the key to other doors along the way, but the death of Crane's hero is final; we find no hint of rebirth or resurrection. When a hero dies along the way, he is eliminated from the quest. Crane's quest, then, in its various stages and in its entirety, mocks the romantic concept of the ultimately successful and glorious quest. The hero is disappointed, disillusioned, or defeated.

Not all of Crane's poetry and fiction is as ironic and unhappy as the quest poems. Several of his major critics assess his work as ultimately hopeful. Daniel Hoffman says of Crane's work: "Confronting huge amoral forces, the individual hews the solitary path of his own unimportant life. His life may be a futile one, but if it has been loyal,

kind, or, supremely, sacrificial, he may take comfort from it when all striving is done."[1] Maurice Bassan feels that "despite the sense of doomed love, despite the futility, the self-mockery, and the attack on the Old Testament Yahweh, the poems display again the wounded spirit of the true believer, skeptical but with an idealistic faith in courage, truth, and virtue."[2] Crane himself, in a letter to Nellie Crouse, said:

> The final wall of the wise man's thought . . . is Human Kindness of course. If the road of disappointment, grief, pessimism, is followed far enough, it will arrive there. Pessimism itself is only a little, little way, and moreover it is ridiculously cheap. The cynical mind is an uneducated thing.[3]

These three views admit the pessimism in Crane's work, but they are ultimately rather hopeful and idealistic. This idealism is not present to a great extent in Crane's quest poems, but it can be found in some of his other poems.

One rather sizeable segment of Crane's poetry that perhaps allows a greater measure of hope than his quest poems is the war poetry. This poetry has not been examined in much detail in this paper, though occasional war poems were cited to illustrate the hero motif. As a whole, however, the war poems do not fit the quest archetype and were not mentioned as a unit. One finds a romantic and idealistic

[1] Hoffman, p. 146. [2] Bassan, pp. 3-4.

[3] Quoted from Cady, p. 77.

strain throughout the war poetry, which, as it progresses, ends on a rather hopeful note. The progression seems to move from "War Is Kind," possibly Crane's most bitter and ironic war poem, to the two most hopeful war poems, "The Blue Battalions" and "Battle Hymn." An example of some of his earliest war poetry might be this poem:

> "Tell brave deeds of war."
>
> Then they recounted tales:
> "There were stern stands
> And bitter runs for glory."
>
> Ah, I think there were braver deeds. (15)

Many of the other early war poems show similar irony toward the supposed glories of war (as does some of Crane's best fiction, of course); in the end, though, Crane sees justification for war, and sees the eventual acceptance by God of mankind in the images of war, as shown in the first and last stanzas of "The Blue Battalions" (74):

> When a people reach the top of a hill
> Then does God lean toward them,
> Shortens tongues, lengthens arms.
> A vision of their dead comes to the weak.
> The moon shall not be too old
> Before the new battalions rise
> --Blue battalions--
> The moon shall not be too old
> When the children of change shall fall
> Before the new battalions
> --The blue battalions--
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The clang of swords is Thy wisdom
> The wounded make gestures like Thy Son's
> The feet of mad horses is one part,
> --Aye, another is the hand of a mother on the
> brow of a son.

Then swift as they charge through a shadow,
The men of the new battalions
--Blue battalions--
God lead them high. God lead them far
Lead them far, lead them high
These new battalions
--The blue battalions--

Hoffman feels that "Nowhere else in his writings does Crane so strikingly envisage the triumph of man over the fated misery of life."[1] We must agree that the image of God leaning down toward the people climbing the hill is more hopeful than many views of God found elsewhere in Crane's poetry. The battle images and the comparisons of the wounded to Jesus combine war with sacrificial suffering, a favorite theme with Crane. In this poem, the battles and the mistakes of mankind will eventually be won as man is led by God toward new heights of truth and love.

This optimism is not, however, found in the poems of the quest. The quest poems bespeak futility of endeavor; one's only hope derives from suffering for others. As Eric Solomon says, "[Crane] met the stereotyped plot and character head on, as it were, laughed at it, and at the same time universalized it by re-creating it according to his stark and anguished view of the human condition."[2] This "stark and anguished view" is evident in the quest poems.

How does Crane's use of the hero motif, with its parody of traditional heroes, place Crane in the entire body

[1]Hoffman, p. 165. [2]Solomon, p. 15.

of literature? We must examine this question in terms of literature as a whole, then more specifically in relation to American literature.

Myth pervades the unconscious. "Known or unknown, [myths] lie within us; we fancy ourselves original, but are really imitating or performing, for life is a steady mythical identification, a procession in the footsteps of others, a sacred repetition."[1] In Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye, as we have mentioned previously, names myth as the principle underlying all literature. To him, myth, with its patterns of ritual and dreams, is present in all literature; it is the reason we can understand literature and "connect one poem with another."[2] Whether the author admits it or not, he says, myth is the basis of communication. According to Frye, the writer need not deliberately exploit myth, as he says Shakespeare did; but myth may be present in any type of literature, even realism:

> The opposite extreme from [Shakespeare's] deliberate exploiting of myth is to be found in the general tendency of realism or naturalism to give imaginative life or coherence to something closely resembling our own ordinary experience. Such realism often begins by simplifying its language, and dropping the explicit connexions with myth which are a sign of an awareness of literary tradition. . . . But, as Wordsworth himself clearly recognized, the result of turning one's back on explicit myth can only be the reconstructing of the same mythical patterns in more ordinary words.[3]

[1] Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelsen, Jr., The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 620.

[2] Frye, Anatomy, p. 100. [3] Frye, Fables, p. 35.

We have suggested before that Stephen Crane probably knew little formal mythology; his use of myth was probably not deliberate or intentional. While he may not have "turned his back" on myth, neither did he show conscious "awareness" of using it. He tried to be original; his unusual form and his lack of definite, proven influences illustrate his originality. But there is a definite mythical pattern in his work; we find him forging, from his own mind and experiences, poems which can be called mythical. F. O. Matthiessen made some interesting comments about Hawthorne:

> Hawthorne . . . did not conceive of his work in any relation to myth. He did not seek universal analogies, but gained his moral profundities by remaining strictly a provincial and digging where he was. . . . By the very fact of not consciously intending it, Hawthorne . . . furnishes a striking if oblique example of Emerson's and Thoreau's major reason for valuing myth: the way it reveals the inevitable recurrence of the elemental human patterns.[1]

This statement applies very aptly to Stephen Crane's use of myth. The very fact of his probable ignorance of traditional mythological themes underscores their unconscious pervasiveness.

Thus we find Crane inadvertently following the oldest traditions in literature by including myth in his poetry. He occasionally accomplished this in an "oblique" manner, to be sure: as Solomon says, "Crane frequently managed to extract

[1]F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), pp. 630-31.

from the subliterary forms he parodied the archetypal or mythical story that underlay the stereotype."[1] These "subliterary forms" include the gay, high-spirited war fiction, the hunting tales and adventure novels, the romantic melodrama. In parodying the idealism of the Romantics, Crane goes even deeper than he probably suspected in grasping the true roots of literature.

We have already examined how well Crane follows Frye's classic tenets for irony: the demonic imagery; sparagmos, the absence of effective heroic action; the death of the hero. When Frye mentions that "One of the central themes of demonic imagery is parody"[2] of the romantic, he might have named Crane's work as one of his best examples.

Other critics do comment upon Crane's affinity with ancient and classical literature. Warren D. Anderson considers Crane's work to be a "most remarkable parallel with Homer." He finds that "essentially the same unreflecting sense of man's oneness with the natural creation underlies the greater part of Homeric simile. . . . Once in a while," he continues, "a writer appears who celebrates the ancient union as if it had never been dissolved--such was Stephen Crane beyond all doubt."[3] This parallel between Crane and

[1]Solomon, p. 17. [2]Frye, Anatomy, p. 147.

[3]Warren D. Anderson, "Homer and Stephen Crane," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XIX (June, 1964), quoted in Stephen Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Maurice Bassan, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 148-49.

Homer can be clarified if we recall lines like "Behold, from the land of the farther suns/ I returned," or "The livid lightnings flashed in the clouds;/ The leaden thunders crashed," both of which sound as though they might have come from the Odyssey.

There is another way in which Stephen Crane fits in the mainstream of some of the world's greatest literature: not simply through the use of myth, but through the use, specifically, of the hero. When we call to mind the memorable literature of the past, we usually have in mind the story of a particular hero: Oedipus, Ulysses, Don Quixote, Hamlet, Lear, Ishmael. Stephen Crane's hero has no name, but his story is in the tradition of these other great heroes; indeed, he shows many similarities to them. Many of these great heroes are, like Crane's hero, often noted for their divergences from the mythological tradition.

James Miller, in his book Quests Surd and Absurd, names two types of heroes: "the one seeking acceptance and stability, the other precisely the opposite."[1] He names as the first type of hero Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of the Waste Land, the Joads, Aeneas, Ulysses, Jay Gatsby: "these heroes seek acceptance, stability, a life embosomed upon what is known and can be trusted." As the second type

[1]James E. Miller, Jr., Quests Surd and Absurd: Essays in American Literature (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 32.

of hero, he names Dedalus, Huck Finn, Ishmael, Huxley's heroes: "these protagonists place themselves outside the bounds of what is known and seek not stability but a Truth which is unwarped by stability." Stephen Crane's nameless hero fits strikingly into the second group. He takes his place in literature among some of the most familiar characters of the literary world, journeying from a known and stable world of organized religion, married love, and often hypocritical human relations, into the unknown world of a true father, true love, and truth itself. The fact that Stephen Crane was perhaps not as great a writer as a Melville or a Sophocles detracts somewhat from his hero's stature, but not from his position, in that revered company.

Having placed Stephen Crane's hero in the total literature of the world, let us focus more specifically on American literature. Again, the story of the hero is well-respected and often used, and Stephen Crane fits into the mainstream of American literature, especially as seen by R. W. B. Lewis in his book The American Adam. According to Lewis, the American experience, the possibility of a completely new civilization on a newly-discovered continent, introduced "a new kind of hero, the heroic embodiment of a new set of ideal human attributes,"[1] especially from the

[1]R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 5.

1820's onward. The so-called American Adam was depicted as

> . . . an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources. . . . In a Bible-reading generation, [he was] most easily identified with Adam before the Fall.[1]

Lewis traces the fate of this Adam through American literature, noting his origins in the optimistic writings of de Crevecoeur, Benjamin Franklin, and James Fenimore Cooper, through a gradual change to an isolated hero "alone in a hostile, or at best a neutral, universe." "As we move from Cooper to Hawthorne," Lewis says, "the situation darkens; qualities of evil and fear and destructiveness have entered; self-sufficiency is questioned through terrible trials; and the stage is set for tragedy."[2] Henry James, and others, convert this hero into "the hero of a new kind of tragedy . . . inherent in his innocence and newness."[3] At this time, then, irony became common in American literature in the work of the realists and the naturalists. The one distinctly American narrative theme arising from this irony, Lewis says, is "the solitary hero and his moral engagement with the alien tribe."[4] Stephen Crane's hero, though not mentioned by Lewis, is perhaps perfectly described as Lewis follows the

[1]Ibid., p. 6.

[2]Ibid., p. 111.

[3]Ibid., p. 7.

[4]Ibid., p. 85.

pattern of the American Adam from his optimistic beginnings to the more tragic interpretation placed upon him by Hawthorne, James, and Whitman:

> The Adamic hero is the equivalent, in American fiction, of the prince or king in the long tradition of classical drama. The telling distinction is one of strategic distance: the distance at the outset between the hero and the world he must cope with. For the traditional hero is at the center of that world, the glass of its fashion, the symbol of its power, the legatee of its history. But the American hero as Adam takes his start outside the world, remote or on the verges; its power, its fashion, and its history are precisely the forces he must learn, must master or be mastered by. Oedipus, approaching the strange city-world of Thebes, was in fact coming home; the hero of the new world has no home to begin with, but he seeks one to come.[1]

Lewis takes little notice of Stephen Crane's hero, in fiction or in poetry; such a fact is inexplicable in light of the evidence supporting Crane's adherence to the pattern described by Lewis. Crane's hero is definitely of his time--the 1890's--and of all time.

We also find cause to name Crane as a forerunner to modern literature in his use of the hero: his hero can be seen as one of the earliest existential heroes. Hemingway's debt to Crane was acknowledged by Hemingway himself, and by many recent critics. In many cases their point of view is the same. "Only in Poe, in Bierce, and in Hemingway among American writers," says Hoffman, "is the sense of the individual's isolation as overwhelming as it is in Crane."

[1]Ibid., p. 128.

He continues:

> Only [they] have neared Crane's lonely outpost from which in his verse he views, and makes us feel, the reality of a universe where force is law, where love is doom, where God is cold, where man's lot is fated misery, where hope is narrowed to the possibility of courage, and the reward of courage is self-sacrifice.[1]

In theme, and in subject matter--and, to a great extent, in form--Hemingway owes much to Crane.

James Miller names four significant elements in the contemporary novel, all of which apply to the poetry we have been studying, though it is neither contemporary nor in novel form:

> 1--the inverted or nightmare world; 2--a disoriented, disaffected, or alienated hero, suffering a severe sickness of the soul--or spiritual nausea; 3--a quest for identity, a search for a self that is leaking away, disappearing, or lost, or--most horrible of all--nonexistent; 4--a multitude of events compounded indiscriminately of horror and humor, a bizarre and even sick comedy that repels at the same time that it evokes guilty and perhaps sinister laughter.[2]

With the possible exception of the last, all these elements correctly describe Stephen Crane's quest poetry. Since a great deal of modern literature is an antithesis of romance, even to a certain extent parodying it, Crane would seem to have been considerably ahead of his time.

In summary, then, Stephen Crane's poetry contains the basic patterns of all literature, in that it contains the archetype of the hero and the quest. In addition, his

[1]Hoffman, pp. 9-10, 278.

[2]Miller, p. 11.

poetry foreshadows modern literature in that his hero motif actually mocks its mythological and romantic origins, turning upon itself to become a disillusioning and defeating journey with no positive accomplishment beyond the sacrificial suffering of the hero. With these considerations in mind, Stephen Crane's poetry gains added dimension in the total body of his work, and in the literature of his--and our--time.

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